COLLABORATION FOR A LIBERATIVE PRAXIS: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN CAPABILITY APPROACH AND CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING IN THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT OF INDIA

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Abstract

This article examines the convergence and divergence between Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (CA) at metaethical, normative, and practical levels. It argues that the metaphysical supernaturalism inherent in CST offers a potential philosophical framework for reconciling their ontological differences, thereby fostering meaningful dialogue between them, resulting in a shared commitment to integral development, human dignity, and the fight against injustice and marginalization. Furthermore, the article proposes that the distinction between proximate and ultimate justifications within Catholic theology could reconcile the epistemological differences, facilitating mutual dialogue between the scholars of Catholic Social Teaching and Sen's Capability Approach. The article illustrates the usefulness of such mutual dialogue in the Indian context, highlighting its relevance in addressing the socio-political challenges of the rise of Hindu nationalism and economic inequality.

Key Words: Catholic Social Teaching, Capability Approach, metaethics, metaphysical supernaturalism, justification, teleology, democracy, Amartya Sen

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Introduction

In the last two decades, there has been a surge of interest in a comparative study between Catholic Social Teaching (CST)[1] and Amartya Sen's[2] Capability Approach (CA).[3] In the recently published book *Integral Human Development: Catholic Social Teaching and The Capability Approach* (2023), several leading scholars of CST and CA explore the possibility of "a dialogue and common ground for action"[4] between them by exploring the issues of integral human development, human agency, freedom, justice, and ecology. While these comparative studies are concerned with these normative issues, very few delve into philosophical and theological comparisons between CST and CA at the metaethical and normative levels. Augusto Zampini Davies advocated for a deeper philosophical dialogue between CST and CA.[5] However, Sen's scepticism toward metaethical inquiries might lead one to dismiss any endeavour to bring these two frameworks into dialogue at the metaethical level as unproductive

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[1] Hereafter, Catholic Social Teaching will be referred to as CST, and the Capability Approach as CA.

[2] Amartya Sen is an Indian economist and moral philosopher who has worked and taught in many major universities across the globe. His contributions to welfare economics, social choice theory, and research on poverty, famine, and developmental economics have been significant. He was awarded the 1998 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences for contributing to welfare economics. He was awarded *Bharat Ratna*, the highest civilian award in India. In 2020, the German Publishers and Booksellers Association awarded him the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade for contributing to global justice issues.

[3] Séverine Deneulin and Clemens Sedmak, *Integral Human Development: Catholic Social Teaching and The Capability Approach* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2023). Séverine Deneulin, *Justice and deliberation about the good life: The contribution of Latin American buen vivir social movements to the idea of justice* (Bath: University of Bath, The Centre for Developmental Studies, 2012). Séverine Deneulin, *Integral Human Development through the Lens of Sen's Capability Approach and the Life of a Faith Community at the Latin American Urban Margins* (Notre Dame: Kellogg Institute, 2018). Séverine Deneulin, *Wellbeing, Justice and Development Ethics* (London, New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2014). 46. Séverine Deneulin, "Beyond Individual Freedom and Agency: Structures of Living Together in the Capability Approach," in *The Capability Approach*, ed. Sabina Alkire, M. Qizilbash and F. Comim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Meghan Clark, "Integrating Human Rights: Participation in John Paul II, Catholic Social Thought and Amartya Sen," in *Political Theology* 8, no.3 (2007): 299-317, https://doi.org/10.1558/poth.v8i3.299.

[4] Séverine Deneulin and Clemens Sedmak, *Integral Human Development: Catholic Social Teaching and The Capability Approach*, 5.

[5] Augusto Zampini Davies, "Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Catholic Social Teaching in Dialogue: An Alliance for Freedom and Justice?" (London: Roehampton University, 2014), 269.

and futile. Nevertheless, the article underscores the significance of addressing and attempting to reconcile ontological and epistemological differences to establish a robust philosophical common ground for joint action toward realising a just society.

It is widely recognised that CST and CA share notable parallels, particularly in their shared emphasis on the well-being of human persons as central to their respective frameworks for theorising justice, development, and human freedom.[6] However, substantial ontological, epistemological, and methodological divergences distinguish the two theoretical frameworks. The article contends that metaphysical supernaturalism offers a framework for addressing their ontological differences, while the concept of proximate and ultimate justifications provides a means to reconcile their epistemological tensions. Such an endeavour could potentially establish a philosophical common ground, fostering collaboration in the pursuit of a just society.

The Magisterium of the Catholic Church has encouraged CST to extend its religious wisdom "to the various fields in which men and women expend their efforts in search of the always relative happiness which is possible in this world, in line with their dignity as persons."[7] Pope John Paul II underscores that "the Church's social teaching has an important interdisciplinary dimension. In order better to incarnate the one truth about man in different and constantly changing social, economic and political contexts, this teaching enters into dialogue with the various disciplines concerned with man."[8] In this legitimate cooperation with other disciplines, CST "assimilates what other disciplines have to contribute, and helps them to open themselves to a broader horizon aimed at serving the individual person who is acknowledged and loved in the fullness of his or her vocation."[9] Building on this interdisciplinary ethos, Pope Benedict XVI, in his social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, calls for "an orderly

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[6] Séverine Deneulin and Clemens Sedmak, *Integral Human Development: Catholic Social Teaching and The Capability Approach,* 5-53.

[7] John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei Socialis* (December 30, 1987), § 41, www.vatican.va /content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_ sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html. (hereafter cited as *SRS*)

[8] *SRS*, § 41.

[9] John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (May 1, 1991), § 59, https://www.vatican.va/ content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_ centesimus-annus.html (hereafter cited as *CA*).

interdisciplinary exchange"[10] in light of the complex issues, problems, and challenges humanity faces today. He insists that "moral evaluation and scientific research must go hand in hand, and that charity must animate them in a harmonious interdisciplinary whole, marked by unity and distinction."[11] Similarly, pope Francis further emphasizes this interdisciplinary approach, advocating for an "integral ecology" that draws from theology and various scientific fields to address interrelated crises such as poverty and environmental degradation. He contends that CST should integrate scientific insights to form a well-rounded response to these challenges, thereby advocating for a collaboration that respects both faith and reason.[12] In keeping with the Magisterial mandate, this article seeks to engage in dialogue with the CA to advance scholarly inquiry. In doing so, it aspires to establish a rigorous philosophical and theological foundation for addressing unjust conditions in India.

The article begins by exploring the convergences and divergences between CST and CA at the ontological level, by exploring metaphysical supernaturalism, grounded in the distinction between the proximate and ultimate good-makers, as a potential framework for reconciling their ontological differences. The article contends that CST's positioning of God as the ultimate good-maker of moral action does not negate CA's dependence on the proximate good-makers. Next, the article addresses the epistemological differences between them through the concepts of proximate and ultimate justifications within Catholic theology that could potentially reconcile their epistemological divergences. On a practical level, the article underscores the shared focus of CST and CA on human flourishing, inherent human dignity, integral human development, freedom, and agency. Both CST and CA are committed to combating the existing and visible injustices, exclusion, alienation, and marginalisation as the first step toward realising a just and equitable society. Despite specific irreconcilable differences, the article posits that mutual engagement between scholars of both traditions can enrich and challenge their respective perspectives on the meaning of the good life and human

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[10] Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (June 29, 2009), § 31, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html (hereafter cited as *CV*).

[11] *CV*, § 31.

[12] Francis, *Laudato Si'* (May 24, 2015), § 62, 63, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html (hereafter cited as *LS*).

flourishing. Such dialogue not only advances CST's mandate to share its religious wisdom but also holds significant promise as a catalyst for liberative praxis in unjust societal contexts. Finally, the article situates this discussion within the Indian context, highlighting its relevance in addressing the challenges posed by rising Hindu nationalism and the growing inequality between the rich and the poor.

Terms and Meanings

Before proceeding further, it is helpful to clarify specific technical terms employed in the article. I use the term *resonance*[13] as the golden mean between dissonance and consonance. In my understanding, resonance holds two persons, objects, traditions, and ideas in a creative tension. In this case, a creative tension exists between CST and Sen's CA. In this article, I refer to CST and CA as theoretical frameworks, referring to their holistic approach to teaching. Further, I deliberately employ Catholic Social Teaching, not excluding Catholic social ethics. Drawing upon the distinctions made by Winfred Löffler, I define Catholic social ethics as a process of critical reflection by individuals, theologians, and institutions of the Catholic Church on contemporary socio-political, economic, and cultural issues from a theological perspective.[14] Often, Catholic social tradition is employed to refer to the well-known social principles of the Catholic Church, culled from the social encyclicals of popes and the Statements of Bishops' Conferences around the world over the last century. *The Compendium of Catholic Social Teaching* lists four main principles: dignity of the human person, common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity.[15] The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) lists seven themes: life and dignity of the human person, call

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[13] I have adapted here Hartmut Rosa's framework of resonance. The German sociologist employs the concept of resonance to describe the relationship between human persons and the world. According to Rosa, the human capacity for resonating with each other and the world constitutes the essence of human psychology, sociality, and corporeality. In other words, resonance is "the ways we interact with the world tactilely, metabolically, emotionally, and cognitively." Rosa explains: "The basic mode of human existence in the world is not just exerting control over things but in resonating with them, making them respond to us, thus experiencing self-efficacy and responding to them in turn." Hartmut Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World*, trans. James, C. Wagner (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020), 31.

[14] Winfried Löffler, "Soziale Gerechtigkeit Wurzeln und Gegenwart eines Konzepts in der Christlichen Soziallehre," in *Gerechtigkeit im politischen Diskurs der Gegenwart*, ed. Peter Koller (Wien: Passagen Verlag, 2001): 28-65.

[15] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of The Social Doctrine of the Church* (London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2005), §§ 160-63.

to family, community and participation, rights and responsibilities, preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, dignity of work and the right of workers, solidarity, and care for God's creation.[16] The Capability Approach is one of Amartya Sen's most significant contributions to moral philosophy. The CA employs core concepts of capabilities, functionings, well-being, and agency as an alternative evaluative space in evaluating the well-being of an individual in a society. A person is flourishing when a person has substantive freedom to achieve certain valuable functionings essential to lead a dignified life.

Another issue must be addressed before entering into a normative dialogue with Amartya Sen, by his own admission, a "non-religious person."[17] It is a question of the distinctiveness of Christian ethics and morality: whether it is possible to claim distinctiveness for Christian ethics and morality without denying the possibility of a non-religious person performing morally worthy actions and their ability to hold true moral beliefs. It becomes a critical question as the article engages with "a non-religious person." The debate about the distinctiveness of Christian morality and ethics has occurred within the Catholic Church for the last sixty years.[18] Without going into details, I want to draw attention to the debate between the *Glaubensethik* (Faith-ethics) and the ethics of moral autonomy.[19] I would argue that in the field of ethics, everyone has to decide on their own insight; therefore, a person is autonomous.[20] On the one hand, the Christian religion follows natural reason and does not present special ethical norms that are valid only for Christian believers. Thus, in ethical decisions, believers are free to have an open, genuine discussion with members of other religions and

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[16] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching,"https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/ catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching.

[17] Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 282.

[18] James J. Walter, "The Questions of the Uniqueness of Christian Morality: An Historical and Critical Analysis of the Debate in Roman Catholic Ethics," in *Methods and Catholic Moral Theology: The Ongoing Reconstruction*, ed. Todd A. Salzman (Omaha, Nebraska: Creighton University Press, 1999): 157-176; Todd A. Salzman, "Specificity, Christian Ethics, and Levels of Ethical Inquiry," in *Methods and Catholic Moral Theology: The Ongoing Reconstruction*, ed. Todd A. Salzman (Omaha, Nebraska: Creighton University Press, 1999): 177-208.

[19] James J. Walter, "The Questions of the Uniqueness of Christian Morality: An Historical and Critical Analysis of the Debate in Roman Catholic Ethics," 178.

[20] Peter Neuner, "Rationality and Religious Ethics: The Discussion on an Autonomous Moral in Catholic Theology," *Revelatory Ethics* 4, no 9 (Autumn &Winter 2025): 66-72 (no DOI found).

even non-religious persons. To all of them, rational arguments are decisive, and the finding of ethical norms is independent of the different religious convictions. On the other hand, for Auer, autonomy is not against God's command; on the contrary, it is the correct way to find it. Therefore, one could argue that autonomy and theonomy are compatible.[21] So, faith, revelation, and grace create a broader horizon in which a moral agent acts and makes normative decisions. The point I want to note here is that "the others" (other religious and non-religious persons) can adopt the practical insights gained from the Christian faith without becoming Christians because they are, in fact, universal. Therefore, CST and CA could engage in a meaningful moral dialogue.

Metaethics

Moral decision-making can be understood as a three-step process integral to daily human life. As rational beings, humans regularly engage in moral deliberations, whether in personal choices — such as limiting meat consumption or selecting clothing — or broader considerations, like opting between fossil fuel or green energy in combating climate change. These practical aspects of decision-making fall under the domain of morality or applied ethics, which examines the ethical implications of everyday choices. In contrast, normative ethics entails a more reflective and analytical approach to establish systematic and rational theories to guide moral deliberations and actions, aiming to articulate general principles that underpin moral judgments and inform decision-making processes. For example, a utilitarian embraces the principle that good is what maximises the utility of the most significant number of people. At a more foundational level, metaethics investigates the underlying semantics, ontology, and epistemological justifications of moral concepts and principles. Unlike applied or normative ethics, metaethics focuses on the nature and meaning of moral terms, as well as the existence of moral facts and properties, addressing the fundamental structure of ethical discourse.

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[21] Alfon Auer, "Can There Be Ethics without Religiousness?" *Fromm Forum* no. 3 (1999): 29-36 (no DIO found); Charles E. Curran, "The Uses and Limitations of Philosophical Ethics in Doing Theological Ethics: Some Reflections from A Roman Catholic Perspective," *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 1984, Vol. 4 (1984): 123-36, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23559369.

At the Metaethical level, CST is predominantly founded on metaphysical realism.[22] Its position can be briefly summed up in the following three fundamental claims. The first is the ontological claim that the Creator God exists independently of His creation. Second, the epistemological claim is that God reveals Himself, i.e., He communicates with human beings in various ways, and human beings can receive this revelation.[23] Third, the semantic claim states that one can speak of truth objectively because it proceeds from God. Metaphysical realism is a natural fit for CST since it emphasises the mind-independent reality and the existence of moral properties, with the belief that moral knowledge is objective.[24] Further, CST views reality as God's creation with a particular order and purpose.[25] This means that human beings who are part of God's creation must conform to the divine order and purpose rooted in the created reality, which forms the basis of morality. With their reasoning capacity, humans can know this purpose and live accordingly. The early social encyclicals based their moral arguments on the natural law theory, which holds metaphysical realism.[26]

On the other hand, Sen advocates non-ontological moral objectivity.[27] As a moral philosopher, Sen's primary concerns are not metaethical. His focus in moral reasoning lies in addressing questions that enhance justice and mitigate injustices, rather than resolving debates about the nature of morality.[28] In hesitating to offer a decisive ontological account of morality, Sen adopts a pragmatic stance, sidestepping traditional metaethical inquiries. He acknowledges the difficulty of engaging with the ontology of morality and, drawing on

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[22] Kevin Jung, "Models of Moral Realism in Christian Ethics," *Harvard Theological Review* 108, no.4 (2015): 485-507, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816015000358; Anthony J. Lisska, "Natural Law and the Roman Catholic Tradition: The Importance of Philosophical Realism," *The American Journal of Economic and Sociology* 71, no.4 (2021): 745-86, https://www.jstor.org/stable/i40080987.

[23] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 51, 52, 53, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM (hereafter abbreviated as *CCC*).

[24] Jung, "Models of Moral Realism in Christian Ethics," 486.

[25] Jung, "Models of Moral Realism in Christian Ethics," 487.

[26] Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (May 15, 1891), §§ 6, 7, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html (hereafter cited as *RN*); Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno* (May 15, 1931), §§ 42-43, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno.html (hereafter cited as *QA*).

[27] Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Cambridge, M.A.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 41.

[28] Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, ix.

Hilary Putnam, views discussions about the existence of moral properties as "unhelpful and misguided."[29] As Sen himself states, "when we debate the demands of ethical objectivity, we are not crossing swords on the nature and content of some alleged ethical 'objects.'"[30] However, Sen does not entirely dismiss the relevance of ontological questions. Instead, he maintains that "ethics cannot be simply a matter of truthful description of specific objects."[31] For Sen, ethical deliberation extends beyond descriptive accuracy, involving a complex interplay of normative and practical considerations. Nonetheless, the methods by which objectivity is pursued in ethical inquiry remain largely implicit and underdeveloped in his work, leaving interpretive challenges and open questions for further exploration. Rather than outrightly rejecting ontological concerns in moral reasoning, Sen's approach reflects a form of ontological quietism, focusing on practical and action-oriented dimensions of ethics over abstract metaethical debates. However, Sen accepts cognitivism as the foundation of moral epistemology and claims that such moral claims and judgments are truth-apt. In affirming human capacity for moral reasoning and objectivity, Sen emphasises "the path of reason" and the "rule of intellect" as the fundamental qualities of human nature.[32]

To engage in a meaningful comparison between CST and CA, it is essential to distinguish between weak and strong cognitivism in moral philosophy.[33] The CST, founded on moral realism, aligns with a strong cognitive view, which posits that moral truths are mind-independent realities rooted in a supernatural order. In contrast, Sen's position can be classified as weak cognitivism,[34] which does not necessarily affirm the existence of moral facts as mind-independent entities. This divergence represents a fundamental ontological tension between the two frameworks. Nonetheless, this difference need not impede

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[29] Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 41.

[30] Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 41.

[31] Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 41.

[32] Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 39.

[33] Kevin Jung, "Models of Moral Realism in Christian Ethics," 485-507.

[34] Sen, in his book *Development as Freedom,* which deals with individual freedom as a social commitment, addresses the issue of God's existence. The issue here concerns the existence of a benevolent God and the reality of innocent suffering in the world. He notes that the theologians often justify such a contradiction as the will of God or the mysterious ways of God. However, Sen is not religious and is not in a position to assess the merit of these theological arguments. Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 282.

constructive dialogue. While CST's metaphysical realism may appear at odds with Sen's pragmatic moral orientation, the two positions can be reconciled through metaphysical supernaturalism. Such an attempt facilitates meaningful dialogue to find a philosophical common ground.

Metaphysical Supernaturalism

Metaphysical Supernaturalism argues that moral facts and properties depend on a supernatural property, i.e., God, in a strong metaphysical sense.[35] At the same time, this position could accommodate an ontological position not as robust as metaphysical realism. The basic argument of realism is that a moral action is right by the moral facts that exist mind-independently. If moral properties depend metaphysically on supernatural properties, one must explore the relationship between supernatural moral facts and natural facts of a moral action. In the Metaphysical term, this relation is qualified as a grounding relation.

Consider an example of not torturing an innocent person: one ought not to torture an innocent person. There are two valid ways of explaining this moral assertion. First, it is morally obligatory to refrain from torturing an innocent person, as such an act fundamentally violates the inherent dignity of the human person. Second, this moral obligation is further grounded in divine command, wherein God, by commanding, establishes the moral imperative not to torture an innocent person. This is rooted in the theological understanding that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God, who wills the good of all persons. Within Catholic theology, the distinction between proximate and ultimate good-makers provides a nuanced understanding of the moral grounding of ethical deliberations and actions. The proximate good-maker refers to the immediate moral quality of an action, such as the inherent wrongness of torturing an innocent person due to the violation of human dignity. The ultimate good-maker, by contrast, points to the divine foundation of moral obligations, wherein God's command establishes the deeper moral significance of actions.

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[35] Bruno Niederbacher, *Metaethik* (München: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2021): 164-65; Bruno Niederbacher, "Metaphysical Supernaturalism and morally worthy actions," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 8, no.3 (2016): 59-73, here 59, https://doi.org/10.24204/ejpr.v8i3.1686; Bruno Niederbacher, "Was hat Moral mit Gott zu tun?," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 131, no.1(2009): 17-25 (no DIO found).

The relationship between the natural fact of refraining from torturing an innocent person and the supernatural fact of God's command is understood as non-causal. For instance, the statement that stealing someone's money is punishable because it is against the law illustrates a non-causal relationship; the law does not cause the action to be punishable but rather defines its punishable nature. Similarly, metaphysical supernaturalists might interpret the obligation not to torture an innocent person as grounded in God's command, with "because" signifying a non-causal, justificatory relationship. In the same way, metaphysical supernaturalists might interpret the statement that one ought not to torture an innocent person as grounded in the divine command forbidding such an action. However, one could argue that individuals may justifiably recognise the moral goodness of an action based on its natural moral qualities, without necessarily invoking beliefs about supernatural facts. This perspective, however, is deemed unacceptable by metaphysical supernaturalists, as it risks undermining the foundational role of divine will in moral ontology. Bruno Niederbacher offers a potential way out by suggesting that metaphysical supernaturalists adopt a less rigid ontological framework. This approach involves distinguishing between two types of good-makers in moral actions: proximate and remote. Proximate good-makers refer to the immediate, natural qualities of action that render it morally good or bad, such as the inherent wrongness of torturing an innocent person due to its violation of human dignity. Remote good-makers, on the other hand, are rooted in the supernatural, the ultimate foundation provided by God's will and command. By acknowledging this distinction, metaphysical supernaturalists can accommodate the legitimacy of proximate good-makers in moral reasoning while preserving the ultimate grounding of morality in the divine, thereby bridging the gap between natural moral understanding and theological commitments.[36]

Proximate and Remote Good-Maker

To clarify the point, consider the example of telling the truth to a friend, which is generally understood to be morally obligatory for two reasons. First, telling the truth to a friend is obligatory because it aligns with God's command. Second, it is obligatory because it promotes the

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[36] Niederbacher, "Metaphysical Supernaturalism and morally worthy actions," 70.

person's well-being.[37] When one believes that telling the truth is obligatory due to its role in promoting human flourishing, this reflects a proximate good-maker. It is the immediate and natural basis for the moral obligation. This does not exclude that there is a remote good-maker that makes the action finally good. However, recognising this proximate good-maker does not preclude the existence of a remote good-maker that provides the ultimate justification for the action's moral goodness. In this view, telling the truth to a friend is obligatory because it ultimately serves human flourishing and is commanded by God, who is inherently good and perfect. For a believer, the remote good-maker of the action is rooted in a theistic fact emphasising the strong metaphysical dependence of moral truths on God. But this does not deny the objectivity of moral truth expressed in the statement: telling the truth to a friend is obligatory because it ultimately promotes the person's well-being. Importantly, this framework preserves the objectivity of the moral truth expressed in the statement: Telling the truth is obligatory because it promotes the person's well-being. It shows that proximate and remote good-makers coexist without contradiction, offering complementary layers of explanation. The proximate good-maker highlights the natural and immediate moral reasoning, while the remote good-maker underscores the ultimate metaphysical grounding in God.

It is normatively justifiable to believe that telling the truth to a friend is obligatory because it ultimately promotes human flourishing. But a deeper philosophical question arises: Why is the fact that an action possesses certain moral properties grounded in the fact that it has specific natural properties? A believer might answer that God establishes this relation between moral and natural properties. For example, a God presumed to be all-loving wills humans to flourish and lead dignified lives. The challenge with this account lies in the explanation that the relation between moral and natural properties is "established by God." Specifically, it suggests that human flourishing is good solely because God wills it, which risks the moral dilemma inherent in divine command theory: the potential arbitrariness of morality. Human flourishing is good because God wills it. If morality depends entirely on God's free will, it could imply that any action, even morally abhorrent ones, might be deemed good if God so willed. While this account is coherent, it appears implausible because it fails

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[37] This example is a modified version of Bruno Niederbacher's example from his article: Niederbacher, "Metaphysical Supernaturalism and morally worthy actions," 69.

to escape the arbitrariness objection.[38] Drawing on Bruno Niederbacher's insights, however, offers a more compelling interpretation of the phrase "being established by God," which avoids the objection of morality becoming arbitrary.[39] Niederbacher argues that "God's wanting or commanding is an expression of God's essence," and since God is essentially good and loving, God's will cannot be arbitrary. Instead, God's commands reflect divine goodness and love.[40] Under this framework, an action's moral obligation is grounded in its natural properties, such as its contribution to human flourishing, as the proximate good-maker. For instance, the property of promoting human flourishing serves as an immediate moral justification for the action. Importantly, a person does not need the additional theistic belief that the grounding relationship between moral and natural properties is established by the will of an essentially good God to perform morally worthy actions.[41] This distinction resolves the arbitrariness objection while maintaining the metaphysical dependence of moral facts on God. This nuanced approach convincingly affirms that moral facts are metaphysically grounded in God while recognising the independence of moral reasoning accessible to all, regardless of theistic belief.[42]

By this implication, metaphysical supernaturalism potentially offers CST a framework to maintain its commitment to metaphysical realism while engaging in meaningful dialogue with CA, which operates within a pragmatic ontological orientation. While this may not fully resolve the ontological differences between CST and CA, such a metaethical position provides a robust foundation for discourse in a pluralistic society where diverse moral traditions intersect. This approach could establish a philosophical common ground for dialogue between CST and CA. Notably, both frameworks reject moral relativism and non-cognitivism, which becomes a critical basis for their engagement. Both traditions affirm the possibility of objective moral reasoning, even if their ontological commitments and methodologies diverge. Thus, it is reasonable to argue that, despite differences in their expressions of moral cognitivism, scholars from both traditions can engage in meaningful metaethical dialogue,

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[38] Niederbacher, "Metaphysical Supernaturalism and morally worthy actions," 71.
[39] Niederbacher, "Metaphysical Supernaturalism and morally worthy actions," 71.
[40] Niederbacher, "Metaphysical Supernaturalism and morally worthy actions," 71.
[41] Niederbacher, "Metaphysical Supernaturalism and morally worthy actions," 71.
[42] Niederbacher, "Metaphysical Supernaturalism and morally worthy actions," 72.

fostering mutual enrichment and collaboration in addressing issues of justice and human flourishing.

Normative Ethics

Normative ethics involves reflecting on and analysing moral decisions and judgments, aiming to develop a comprehensive, systematic, and rational theory of moral actions. This domain seeks to establish general principles guiding moral decisions and actions. Two ethical frameworks, such as CST and CA, may employ the same semantic terms, such as "good," "right," "human development," or "flourishing," but differ significantly in their types or levels of justification. This difference creates a creative tension between the semantic and epistemological realms. Semantic assertions pertain to metaethics, while epistemic claims relate to the methodological processes underlying moral reasoning. In the previous section, the ontological differences between CST and CA were explored, attempting to reconcile them within the framework of metaphysical supernaturalism. It is equally essential to explore the epistemological differences between CST and CA, particularly the reliance on distinct means of justifying moral assertions. When examining the interplay between semantic and epistemological realms, four possible permutations can be identified: first, the same meaning or use of ethical terms with different types or levels of justification; second, the same meaning or use of ethical terms with the same types or levels of justification; third, a different meaning or use of ethical terms with the same types or levels of justification; and fourth, a different meaning or use of ethical terms with different types or levels of justification. This analytical framework offers a structured approach to understanding how CST and CA may align or diverge in their methodological orientations. It thereby facilitates a deeper exploration of their epistemological commitments and the potential for constructive dialogue.

The early social encyclicals, especially *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesima Anno*, employed natural law theory and based their moral arguments on it.[43] Pope Leo XIII, in *Rerum Novarum* (1891), appealed to natural law theory to justify the position on the natural right to private property, rejection of socialism, the function of political authority, and the rights and duties of workers and

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[43] Charles Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching: 1891-Present: A Historical, Theological, and Ethical Analysis* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 54.

employers.[44] Leo XIII writes: "For man, fathoming by his faculty of reason matters without number, linking the future with the present, and being master of his own acts, guides his ways under the eternal law and the power of God, whose providence governs all things."[45] Pius XI, in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), employed the natural law argument to stress the teleological aspect of economic activities. Based on human beings' individual and social nature, Reason comprehends the purpose God ordained for all economic life.[46] Before the Second Vatican Council (1963-65), the social encyclicals used this classical approach to moral reasoning and justification. However, they were also sensitive to the historical reality of their times.

With John XXIII (1958-63), there was a shift from natural law theory to the historical-conscious method, which became one of the important ethical methods in CST, emphasising the particular, the contingent, and history without denying the universality and objectivity of moral truth. This approach employed the inductive method in forming moral reasoning and judgments. John XXIII believed it was necessary to understand a situation's reality as fully as possible to make a normative judgment on it. He introduced the see-judge-act method to CST. In this approach, John XXIII's sensitivity to the historical context is strong, yet he does not deny the universal and objective moral truth. Like previous popes, he accepted the nature of the human person and the nature of things as valid references for various normative directives. However, he also regarded the particular historical context of contemporary society as a key factor in deriving conclusions from normative principles and making normative reflections. "The principles she [the Church] gives are of universal application, for they [the principles] take human nature into account and the varying conditions in which man's life is lived. They also consider the principal characteristics of contemporary society. They are thus acceptable to all."

The Second Vatican Council documents indicate a clear shift from classical natural law theory to a historical conscious method. For example, *Gaudium et Spes* emphasised "the duty of scrutinising the signs of the times," which illustrates the shift from natural law theory's essentialist method to a more historically conscious method. In this sense, the Second Vatican Council documents are much more

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[44] *RN*, §§ 6, 7, 8, 9, 11.

[45] *RN*, § 6.

[46] *QA,* § 42.

sensitive to the changing historical contexts. The council fathers discussed contemporary circumstances, pointing out that the living conditions of human beings had been so profoundly changed since the Second World War. For example, *Gaudium et Spes* accommodates "brotherly dialogue among men."[47] As moral agents, humans play an important role in such moral discourse and norm building. It reminds us of the responsibility for promoting mutual dialogue between persons, communities, and nations. It is also important to note that there was a focus shift from human nature to the historical context of human persons in normative valuations. The example of the see-judge-act method in *Mater et Magistra* illustrates this shift. Further, there is also a shift from human nature to the human person as the subject of morality.[48] Pope Paul VI writes in *Octogesima Adveniens*: "Two aspirations persistently make themselves felt in these new contexts, and they grow stronger to the extent that he becomes better informed and better educated: the aspiration to equality and the aspiration to participation, two forms of man's dignity and freedom."[49] A human person is viewed as a subject or agent capable of human acts and bringing about transformation. Human flourishing and development indispensably involve human freedom, equality, and participation.

The gradual shift from viewing human nature as solely capable of reasoning and self-determination to considering the person as a human subject highlights human capacity for freedom, equality, and participation. In this context, Pope John Paul II emphasises the "relationality-responsibility model." When discussing "the Structures of sin," he advocates for "conversion," which suggests repairing relationships with God, others, and nature. In his encyclicals, Pope Francis emphasises this relationality-responsibility towards the poor and the environment. Consequently, environmental justice is an essential aspect of social justice. They cannot be treated as separate issues, as human beings are an integral part of nature. Thus, Pope Francis spoke of "ecological conversion," which is understood as "the effects of their [believers] encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them." This also reflects a

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[47] *GS*, § 23.

[48] Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching: 1891-Present: A Historical, Theological, and Ethical Analysis*, 67.

[49] Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens* (May 14, 1971), § 22, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens.html, (hereafter cited as *OA*).

clear relationality-responsibility model. Such a model recognises the interdependence among individuals, communities, and nations. The principle of solidarity addresses this interdependence across various levels: cultural, socio-political, ecSen's CA also employs the moral terms freedom, human flourishing, good, justice, and development. Here, the focus is on substantive freedom to lead a life one has reason to value. This becomes a criterion to judge human well-being. In his framework of the Capability Approach, human persons are seen as agents capable of bringing about change in the world. Rooted in the liberal tradition, Sen does not directly emphasise obligation or duty. However, in agency freedom, a human person can assume moral responsibility for the well-being of others. In his book, The Idea of Justice, Sen emphasises the awareness of injustices worldwide as the starting point of moral reflection. But this does not stop with "simply recording our immediate perceptions." Sen writes: "Understanding inescapably involves reasoning. We have to 'read' what we feel, and seem to see, and ask what those perceptions indicate and how we may take them into account without being overwhelmed by them." Such a normative method closely aligns with CST's see-judge-act method. Both CST and CA call for exercising human agency in the third stage of moral reasoning. As noted earlier, human agency is crucial in social transformation. Humans can exercise reason, with equal moral worth, deliberate, and act to change the world. Therefore, human agency involves acting and participating to reduce injustices and facilitate the realisation of human dignity and human flourishing.

Proximate and Ultimate Justification

However, there is an inherent tension between CST and CA, as they derive their moral reasoning from distinct sources of justification. CST argues for human freedom based on the theological conviction that "the human person is a creature of God." This framework underscores human dignity, relationality, rationality, self-determination, and equal value as integral to the concept of freedom. For CST, human freedom is fundamentally oriented toward God, who is both the source and ultimate goal of human life. Humans, created in the image and likeness of God, possess inviolable dignity and are called to respond freely to God's revelation, achieving fulfillment in God. Central to CST's vision of human freedom is the idea of living in the right relationships—with God, others, and nature. This interconnectedness entails responsibilities toward others and the environment. In his encyclicals, Pope Francis emphasises this relationality by urging humanity to hear both the cry of the earth and

the cry of the poor. Authentic freedom and flourishing, in this view, are achieved by living in accordance with one's inherent dignity and moral worth, which necessarily includes recognising the dignity of others and caring for creation. In contrast, Sen's CA bases its argument for substantive freedom on human rationality and dignity. Sen emphasises that freedom enables individuals to achieve human flourishing and lead lives of dignity, an idea broadly acceptable to most rational persons. While Sen's justification is rooted in secular reasoning and lacks explicit theological underpinnings, it does not necessarily contradict CST's framework. Despite these differences, there are shared commitments between the two frameworks, particularly their emphasis on human dignity, freedom, and flourishing. While CST locates the foundation of these values in the loving God and divine revelation, Sen derives them from a pragmatic and rationalistic perspective.

Although there is a semantic convergence between CST and CA in employing terms like human dignity, freedom, development, and well-being, there is a definite epistemological divergence. Such a divergence in their source of justification remains robust. However, this epistemic divergence could be reconciled by employing the concept of proximate and ultimate justification. The natural law theory, within CST, has consistently upheld that moral knowledge is accessible through human reasoning, experience, and scientific inquiry, which are necessary and valid sources of justification. Faith in God serves as the ultimate justification for the moral assertions within the natural law theory. In the early Christian tradition, there were efforts to employ scripture as a philosophical defense of natural law, notably in Romans 2:15, which references "the law written on their hearts." St. Augustine integrated Stoic concepts of reason and order into the entirety of God's Creation. For him, when reason controls the human soul, the human person is said to be ordered. Similarly, St. Thomas Aquinas identifies reason as the primary source of human knowledge. For Aquinas, the moral precepts of the law originate from the dictates of reason, which he regards as the proximate justification for natural law.[50] While Aquinas affirms God as the ultimate source of natural law, he emphasises that this theological foundation does not undermine the capacity of human reason to know and comprehend moral law. Consequently, the ability

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[50] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II.108. 2.

to discern the law is accessible to all human beings, irrespective of their faith—believers and non-believers alike.

This distinction allows for a differentiation between the philosophical ethical method and the Christian ethical method.[51] The philosophical ethical method of CA provides a proximate justification, defining the good as authentic personhood realized in substantive freedom, a justification that is both necessary and sufficient. While employing the same tools as the philosophical ethical method, such as reason, experience, and scientific inquiry, the Christian ethical method rests on the belief, albeit without demonstrable proof, that the ultimate justification for moral deliberation and action lies in God. By implication of this concept, CST and CA could agree on the moral principle that torturing an innocent person is wrong, yet they may differ significantly in their sources of justification. For CST, the rejection of torture is grounded in the belief in the existence of God as the ultimate source of moral authority. God's will and revelation establish the inherent dignity of the human person, which renders acts such as torture morally unacceptable. However, CST's reliance on God as the ultimate source of moral justification does not preclude other forms of justification. Moral justification can be classified into proximate and ultimate levels. Proximate justification refers to immediate, context-specific reasons for rejecting certain actions, such as appeals to human rights, rationality, or social harmony. These arguments might be accessible to those not sharing CST's theological commitments. Ultimate justification, on the other hand, concerns the foundational moral and metaphysical principles underpinning those proximate reasons, such as the belief in God as the creator and sustainer of human dignity. By distinguishing between proximate and ultimate justification, CST creates space for dialogue with secular or alternative frameworks, such as CA, that may reject theological premises but arrive at similar moral conclusions through different rationales. This layered understanding of justification allows CST to affirm its theological commitments while engaging in pluralistic ethical discourse.

The ultimate justification in CST does not negate proximate justification; rather, it reinforces and affirms it through a theological framework that, for Christians, validates insights gained through reason and experience. For example, proximate justification might appeal to principles of human dignity and rationality derived from

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[51] Salzman, "Specificity, Christian Ethics, and Levels of Ethical Inquiry," 192.

observable reality and practical reasoning. Ultimate justification, however, roots these principles in a theological understanding of humanity as created in the image of God and destined for communion with God, providing a deeper ontological grounding for the same ethical conclusions. In contrast, CA justifies moral principles based on humanity's inherent dignity and the respect owed to individuals by virtue of their human nature. This justification is non-theological, relying on secular reasoning and empirical observations. Nonetheless, its conclusions—such as affirming the inviolability of human dignity—often align with the moral principles CST upholds. The fact that both CST and CA can agree on the definition of ethical terms, such as human dignity or respect, yet justify them through distinct types or levels of reasoning, highlights a crucial distinction between the meaning and justification of ethical concepts. While CST integrates theological principles into its justification, CA adheres to a pragmatic, secular rationale. This divergence underscores the radically different types of ethical reasoning employed by these frameworks, yet it also provides an avenue for dialogue and mutual enrichment through shared ethical commitments.

Teleology

Within CST, the methodological shift from essentialism of natural law theory to a historical conscious method prompted a metaethical transformation, changing the focus from human nature to human person.[52] From essentialism's perspective, the good is understood as that which directs human beings toward their natural end, ultimately to God. In contrast, the historical conscious method views the good as that which facilitates and fulfills "the human person integrally and adequately considered."[53] This brings us to teleology, a normative theory that holds the view that all beings and things are metaphysically directed to some ultimate end. In the framework of teleology, the moral agents act to bring about certain goals, purposes, or states of affairs that facilitate fulfilling one's purpose in life. Aristotle is, in this sense, the teleologist *par excellence*. Influenced by Aristotle, Aquinas holds that to act morally is to realise human excellence or virtue, the *telos*. Aquinas viewed moral acts as consistent with what is natural to humans as their end or purpose, i.e., to act reasonably and freely, to know the truth, and to do what is good. Drawing on the insights of Aquinas, CST embraces the idea that God

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[52] Salzman, "Specificity, Christian Ethics, and Levels of Ethical Inquiry," 191.
[53] Salzman, "Specificity, Christian Ethics, and Levels of Ethical Inquiry," 191.

is the ultimate end of human beings.[54] God created the world in accord with God's plan and endowed human beings with the capability of reasoning so that by reflecting on God's creation, human beings can discover the plan of God. Humans can determine how God wants humans to live and act through this reasoning capacity. Living accordingly constitutes their authentic human flourishing. However, Sen's Capability Approach endorses a different form of teleology. For Sen, the ultimate goal of human life is the attainment of human flourishing, consisting of the substantive freedom of an individual to choose certain valuable functionings to lead a dignified life. For Sen, the human being is endowed with reason and is capable of making choices that help him/her to lead a life one has reason to value. The real freedom to realise certain valuable functionings, i.e., valuable beings, and doings, becomes the ultimate criterion to judge the well-being of an individual, development, justice, and morality. Any moral evaluation ought to consider these teleological dimensions.

In CST, the ultimate good is the beatific vision of God. For Sen, the highest good is human flourishing, achieved through the substantive freedom of individuals to choose valuable beings and activities to lead a life worth valuing. However, CST does not dismiss Sen's understanding of human flourishing; it simply elevates and extends the concept of human well-being into the spiritual realm. Drawing from the Thomistic tradition, a distinction can be made between two types of happiness: perfect and imperfect goods. The imperfect good is realised through activities perfected by virtue in this world. Leading a virtuous life in accordance with reason leads to happiness, which constitutes imperfect happiness. Conversely, the perfect good is attained only through the grace and aid of God, realised in the beatific vision. Sen has consistently expressed scepticism towards transcendental conceptions of the human good. Reflecting on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, a Sanskrit text from the 8th century B.C., Sen examines a dialogue between Maitreyee and her husband, Yajnavalkya, which discusses the limitations of material wealth in achieving ultimate fulfilment. When Maitreyee asks whether possessing "the whole earth, full of wealth," could grant her immortality, Yajnavalkya dismisses the idea, asserting that wealth cannot secure eternal life. Maitreyee's rhetorical question—challenging the value of wealth if it cannot lead to immortality—has

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[54] Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Teleology, Utilitarianism, and Christian Ethics," *Theological Studies* 42 (1981): 601-29, https://doi.org/10.1177/004056398104200404.

become an important reference point in Indian philosophical discourse, illustrating the limitations of material wealth in providing ultimate fulfilment. Despite these substantial differences, CST and CA agree that human well-being transcends material progress. Authentic human development is non-material, multidimensional, and open-ended. In this regard, CST offers something unique to CA. The multidimensionality of human flourishing in Sen's theoretical framework could be extended and enriched through other non-material considerations beyond substantive freedom by being open to the spiritual dimension. The meaningful relationships with God, others, and nature are potential capabilities that enrich human lives. The complexity of the human person cannot be reduced solely to materialistic terms. In this sense, Sen's framework is justified in expanding the concept of human well-being to include non-material aspects: capabilities, freedom, and valuable functioning. However, CST takes this further by extending well-being to the relationship with transcendence. Benedict XVI writes: "All this is of man, because man is the subject of his own existence; and at the same time, it is of God, because God is at the beginning and end of all that is good, all that leads to salvation." John Paul II referred to human "capacity for transcendence." For him, a human person has the ability of self-gift: "As a person, he can give himself to another person or to other persons, and ultimately to God, who is the author of his being and who alone can fully accept his gift. A man is alienated if he refuses to transcend himself and to live the experience of self-giving and of the formation of an authentic human community oriented towards his final destiny, which is God." CST views human beings as inseparably related to God, who is their origin and destination. Every human has an inherent capacity for God. Therefore, human well-being is ultimately a journey of growth towards God. Catholic social tradition maintains that authentic and integral human development must ultimately be a growth and journey towards the transcendent, i.e., God, who has created and liberated the human race and offered redemption through Jesus Christ.

Liberative Praxis in the Socio-political Context of India

The article has examined the points of convergence and divergence between CST and CA, highlighting their potential for mutual dialogue and collaboration, which could foster a liberative praxis within the socio-political context of India. Methodologically, CST and CA underscore the importance of beginning ethical reflection with the realities of visible injustices. In response to such injustices, Pope

Francis advocates fostering a culture of mercy,[55] while Amartya Sen emphasised the necessity of empathy and commitment to transforming unjust conditions.[56] It is a fact that economic inequalities are growing in India, which has been corroborated by scholars and research studies.[57] The impact of such growing economic inequality is intensely felt at the margins of Indian society. The scheduled Tribes (ST) and Scheduled Castes (SC) have suffered the most "from physical remoteness and systematic exclusion from the means of development and participation."[58] The concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a few has led to "the persistence of marginalisation among the historically disadvantaged"[59] groups like the poor, the Dalits, the women, and other minorities. *The State of Inequality in India Report* released in 2022 by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, confirmed rising inequality in India. According to the *Oxfam Report 2022*, since 2015, more and more of India's wealth has gone to its richest one percent.[60] *The World Inequality Report 2022* confirms India is one of the most unequal countries, with 228.9 million poor.[61]

Contrasting this harsh reality, the elite in India continues to witness exponential growth in their wealth. According to the *Oxfam Report 2023*, the number of billionaires in India increased from 102 in 2020 to 166 in 2022.[62] Following the pandemic in 2019, the bottom 50 percent of the population lost their wealth significantly. By 2020, the income share of the bottom 50 percent was estimated to have fallen to 13 percent, and they own only 3 percent of the total wealth in the

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[55] Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (March 19, 2016), §§ 310, 312, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia.html (hereafter Cited as *AL*).

[56] Sen, *On Economics and Ethics*, 80.

[57] Ashoka Mody, *India is Broken: A People Betrayed, Independence to Today* (Standford: Standford University Press, 2023). Mody argues that India failed to create adequate jobs right from the beginning. Currently, India has failed to generate sufficient jobs. Even though data on employment in India are both low quality and controversial, recent news revealed that 28 million applied for 90,000 low-level railway jobs, suggesting India has failed to address the job demand. Creating jobs and employing the youth is a way of dignifying and freedom to participate in economic demand. India has one of the lowest female participation rates in the labor force, down from 35 percent in 1990 to 27 percent in 2017.

[58] Oxfam India, *The Survival of the Richest: The India Story* (New Delhi: Oxfam India, 2023), 7.

[59] Oxfam India, *The Survival of the Richest: The India Story*, 7.

[60] Oxfam India, *The Survival of the Richest: The India Story*, 7.

[61] *The World Inequality Report 2022*, https://wir2022.wid.world/.

[62] Oxfam India, *The Survival of the Richest: The India Story*, 7.

country.[63] On the other hand, the top 30 percent owns more than 90 percent of the total wealth. Among them, the top 10 percent own more than 80 percent of the total wealth in the country.[64] Adding to it, the country still has the world's highest number of poor at 228.9 million, one of the largest in the world.[65] Beyond the apparent class differences between the rich and the poor in India, substantial wealth and relational inequality persist on gender, caste, and geographical lines.[66] This situation of inequality makes people with low incomes vulnerable to the vagaries of the economy, ecological crisis, and other socio-political exclusion. This vulnerability robs these poor people of their freedom and control over their lives. Such a loss of economic freedom burdens them during inflation. It vitiates society by instilling social anger, with the rich getting richer and the poor becoming powerless, alienated, and unable to lead a dignified life.[67] The impact is amplified in a country like India, where most are employed as informal workers engaged in precarious work with no security of tenure, fixed salary, and legal or social protection. The most vulnerable informal workers are daily wage workers.[68] The National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) reports that, on average, 115 daily wage workers died by suicide every day in 2021.[69] Moreover, the pandemic-induced financial stress and high inflation have led to an increase in household debt.[70] Adding to it, women suffer much worse in this situation of inequality. Every seventh household in India is female-headed. Close to 39 million poor live in households headed by women. In India, poverty is significantly prevalent among female-headed households. Women are often excluded from inheriting wealth despite national laws. According to the Periodic Labour Force

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[63] Ranjan Aneja, Vaishali Ahuja, "An assessment of socioeconomic impact of Covid-19 pandemic in India," *Public Affairs* 21 (2021): 1-7, https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2266; Krishna Ram, Shivani Yadav, "The Impact of Covid-19 on Poverty Estimates in India: A Study Across Caste, Class, and Religion," *Contemporary Voice of Dalits* (2021): 1-15, https://doi.org/10.1177/2455328X211051432; Oxfam India, *The Survival of the Richest: The India Story*, 14.

[64] Oxfam India, *The Survival of the Richest: The India Story*, 14.

[65] Oxfam India, *The Survival of the Richest: The India Story*, 14; Himanshu Nitanaware, "India has pushed back poverty, still home to most poor people in world: UNDP Index," https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/governance/india-has-pushed-back-poverty-still-home-to-most-poor-people-in-world-undp-index-85502.

[66] Anne Case and Agnus Deaton, *Death of Despair and the Future of Capitalism* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020), 1-3.

[67] Oxfam India, *The Survival of the Richest: The India Story*, 11.

[68] Oxfam India, *The Survival of the Richest: The India Story*, 12.

[69] Oxfam India, *The Survival of the Richest: The India Story*, 12.

[70] Oxfam India, *The Survival of the Richest: The India Story*, 12.

Survey (PLFS July 2021-June 2022), 29.4 percent of women aged 15-59 were part of India's labor force.[71] *Oxfam India's Discrimination Report* 2022 found that only 19 percent of employed women are in regular-salaried jobs compared to 60 percent of employed men.[72]

In this challenging reality, the collaborative synergy between CA and CST could provide a strong framework for effectively addressing poverty and inequality. For Sen, the impetus to work for justice stems from a direct encounter with the real-world injustices. Similarly, Christian theology is profoundly grounded in the reality of human suffering, as exemplified in the words of God in Exodus: "I have seen the troubles my people have suffered in Egypt, and I have heard their cries when the Egyptian slave masters hurt them. I am concerned about their pain" (Exodus 3:7). Both CA and CST converge in their commitment to confronting injustice through a threefold process of seeing, judging, and acting. By examining the harsh realities of inequality and poverty, CA offers a more nuanced approach to understanding poverty, surpassing conventional material metrics such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Product (GNP). It employs tools like the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), developed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI). Using ten indicators, the MPI evaluates poverty across three dimensions—health, education, and living standards.[73] According to this approach, individuals are classified as poor if they are deprived of at least one of these dimensions. Recent data underscores the significance of this approach. The National Multidimensional Poverty Index Progress Review (2023) revealed that India's multidimensional poverty rate dropped from 24.85% in 2015-16 to 14.96% in 2019-21, lifting approximately 135 million people out of poverty. Meanwhile, income-based poverty measures, such as those by the World Bank, report a reduction in extreme poverty from 22.5% in 2011 to 10.2% in 2019. These findings highlight the complementary insights provided by capability deprivation analysis and underscore the persistent

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[71] Dhruvika Dhamija and Akshi Chawla, "Growth in Female Labour Force Participation in India Now Seems to Be Stagnating," https://thewire.in/women/women-labour-force-india-growth.

[72] Oxfam India, *India Discrimination Report 2022*, 14.

[73] Séveine Deneulin and Augusto Zampini Davies, "Combining the Capability Approach and Catholic Social Teaching to Promote Integral Human Development," in *Integral Human Development: Catholic Social Teaching and The Capability Approach*, ed. Séverine Deneulin and Clemens Sedmak (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2023), 160.

disparities between multidimensional and income-based assessments of poverty.

Further, the CA enriches CST's preferential option for the poor by integrating the multidimensional aspects of life, offering a more comprehensive assessment of poverty and inequality. To address poverty, one needs to have the right tools and methods of identifying the poor. The CA provides such a theoretical framework, not limiting poverty to lack of income.[74] This perspective reinforces the Church's engagement with the poor, making its responses to poverty more effective. Pope Francis's emphasis on interconnectedness resonates with this approach, recognizing the unity of body, soul, mind, heart, culture, economy, politics, and the environment.[75] Beyond material deprivation, poverty also encompasses relational and spiritual dimensions, particularly evident in the Indian context. For example, the caste system perpetuates relational poverty by marginalizing low-caste individuals, excluding them from social participation and access to basic resources like education, clean water, and infrastructure. Moreover, excessive individualism and the concentration of wealth and power exacerbate both material poverty for the marginalized and spiritual poverty for the affluent. Conversely, fostering good relationships and cultivating vibrant faith communities can inspire hope and catalyze transformative change. The CA's multidimensional focus complements CST's vision of integral human development, addressing the multifaceted realities of poverty and providing a holistic framework for liberation and justice.

CA applies the principles of social choice theory through comparative evaluation to conceptualise justice. This approach involves analysing and comparing two societies to determine which is more just, based on the expansion of individuals' capabilities. In the Indian context, Sen contrasts the disparity in quality of life between Bihar and Kerala, concluding that the ability to lead long and healthy lives is profoundly influenced by the quality of political institutions and the capacity of citizens to organise politically to advocate for their claims. The success of such organisations in shaping government spending priorities underscores the importance of fostering an informed and critical citizenry to demand accountability and combat

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[74] Séverine Deneulin and Augusto Zampini Davies, "Combining the Capability Approach and Catholic Social Teaching to Promote Integral Human Development," 161.

[75] *LS*, § 70.

political corruption. As Sen asserts, "Our opportunities and prospects depend crucially on what institutions exist and how they function." Therefore, analysing institutional structures and their operation becomes essential for assessing progress towards a freer, fairer, and more sustainable society. While CA provides precise tools for comparing situations and evaluating institutional effectiveness in advancing human capabilities, CST offers complementary resources to deepen the evaluative process, particularly by focusing on the excluded, marginalised, or oppressed. Sen emphasises that the voices of the poor are often absent from media discourse, influencing election outcomes and policy priorities in ways that neglect their needs. CST attributes this lack of focus to the absence of what Pope Francis calls a "throw-away culture" in Evangelii Gaudium and Fratelli Tutti, which desensitises society. As an alternative, he advocates a "culture of encounter" and a "culture of the lowly." The see-judge-act methodology central to CST insists that evaluating reality begins with the lived experience. Political change requires the conversion of political leaders, who bear the primary responsibility for initiating policy reforms. Such change emerges through political dialogue and public action. Pope Francis regards politics as a noble vocation and the highest form of charity, emphasising the need for far-sighted policymakers who prioritise long-term benefits over immediate gains. However, political transformation is not limited to the conversion of policymakers. We cannot wait for such a drastic change among politicians without social pressure. Hence, grassroots political pressure can also play a significant role in effecting change. An example of this is the "Eddelu Karnataka" movement in India, which exemplifies collective action aimed at institutional reform that could change the way politics is conducted. In the 2018 Karnataka elections, the BJP did not achieve the required majority to form the government. However, through "Operation Kamala," the party used financial incentives to poach Members of the Legislative Assembly from other parties. Once in power, the BJP focused on communal polarisation, promoting aggressive nationalism, and tolerating corruption. The party passed controversial bills, such as the anti-cow slaughter and anti-conversion bills, which harassed minorities, especially Muslims and Christians. Incidents of vandalism against Muslim and Christian places of worship increased, and Muslim girls faced restrictions on wearing hijabs in schools, leading many to stop attending classes. Hindu fringe groups called for boycotts of Muslim traders. Media reports uncovered scams involving government officials receiving 40

percent commissions as bribes for developmental project approvals. The BJP used hate speeches to distract from pressing issues like healthcare, education, employment, good governance, ecological concerns, farmer issues, poverty reduction, inflation, and privatisation. In response, public intellectuals, activists, and progressive organisations, including Christian organisations and the Jesuits, initiated the Eddelu Karnataka (Wake-up Karnataka) movement. This coalition of approximately one hundred organisations mobilised volunteers to address key issues and registered 160,000 new voters. They focused on 70 constituencies where the nationalist party had previously won by narrow margins. Volunteers organised workshops and conducted outreach, engaging 200,000 people, including farmers, labourers, Dalits, women, students, tribal communities, and minority groups. The movement avoided divisive language, emphasising the dangers of ultra-religious nationalism and advocating for pluralism and democracy. During a time of constitutional crisis, when pluralism and democracy were under threat, and the mainstream media had capitulated to fascist forces, a coalition of civil society representatives managed to oust the politics of divisive ideology.

The movement serves as a beacon of hope for the potential collaboration between CST and CA in addressing the rising challenges of poverty and inequality. As fascist forces sought to transform the nation into a Hindutva state, conscientious citizens came together to resist this attempt. CST and CA share a foundational commitment to engaging with lived experiences of injustice, poverty, and marginalisation, which serve as starting points for critical ethical reflection and institutional reform. The CA offers sophisticated tools for identifying and assessing the conditions of the poor and marginalized, enhancing CST's commitment to the preferential option for the poor. In return, CST enriches the discourse by contributing spiritual and moral dimensions that emphasise the imperative to "see, judge, and act" in response to the suffering of marginalised communities. Initiatives such as "*Eddelu Karnataka*" exemplify how grassroots movements can drive institutional transformation through collective action. While CA underscores the necessity of diverse forms of public action to reshape institutions, CST, with its deep spiritual tradition, complements this by fostering the moral and emotional impetus needed for both personal and systemic change. Together, these frameworks advance a praxis of integral development that

prioritises the dignity and well-being of each individual while addressing the interdependence of human and ecological flourishing.

Conclusion

This article examined the resonance and divergence between CST and CA on metaethical, normative, and practical levels. It has been argued that the metaphysical supernaturalism embedded in CST provides a philosophical foundation capable of reconciling ontological differences, thereby fostering a meaningful dialogue rooted in a shared commitment to integral development, human dignity, and the fight against injustice and marginalisation. Additionally, the article has suggested that the distinction between proximate and ultimate justifications within Catholic theology offers a pathway to reconciling the epistemological differences between them, enabling scholars from both traditions to engage in fruitful dialogue and establish common ground for a liberative praxis. Finally, the article has demonstrated the relevance and potential of this liberative praxis in the Indian context, emphasising its capacity to address pressing socio-political challenges, such as the rise of Hindu nationalism and economic inequality, through grassroots political activism.