

# An Overview on Well-being Theories and the Role of Individual Responsibility<sup>1</sup>

## *Uma Revisão das Teorias de Bem-Estar e o Papel da Responsabilidade Individual*

Pedro Henrique de Morais Campetti<sup>2</sup> 

### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to make a theoretical review on the main approaches to Well-being and also introduce the subject of Responsibility as an element to be considered in this discussion. Thus, three theories of well-being are presented: the Mainstream Economics, the Happiness Economics and The Capability Approach. Each of them provides considerations about what matters for people's life and social development. However, none of them contemplates individual responsibility as a relevant component for development. And only The Capability Approach takes account of responsibility, but without furthering the subject. In this sense, the theme of responsibility is defended as having an important role for development and well-being, and could be incorporated by The Capability Approach.

**Keywords:** Well-being; Capability Approach; Responsibility; Human Development.

### RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objetivo fazer uma revisão teórica sobre as principais abordagens do Bem-Estar Social e também introduzir o tema Responsabilidade como um elemento a ser considerado nesta discussão. Assim, são apresentadas três teorias de bem-estar: a Economia Mainstream, a Economia da Felicidade e a Abordagem das Capacitações. Cada uma destas fornece considerações sobre o que é importante para a vida das pessoas e para o desenvolvimento social. No entanto, nenhuma delas contempla a responsabilidade individual como um componente relevante para o desenvolvimento. Por outro lado, a Abordagem das Capacitações leva em conta a responsabilidade, mas sem aprofundar o assunto. Nesse sentido, o tema da responsabilidade é defendido como tendo um papel importante para o desenvolvimento e o bem-estar, e pode ser incorporado pela Abordagem das Capacitações.

**Palavras-chave:** Bem-estar; Abordagem das Capacitações; Responsabilidade; Desenvolvimento Humano.

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<sup>2</sup> IFRS – Instituto Federal do Rio Grande do Sul; UFRGS – Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul.

Autor Correspondente: Pedro Henrique de Morais Campetti

E-mail: [pedro\\_campetti@yahoo.com.br](mailto:pedro_campetti@yahoo.com.br)

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## 1 Introduction

Well-being refers to the person's conditions, situation or state of life. To identify this, a sort of different terms has been used in the literature such as quality of life, standard of living, and human development. Others include utility, prosperity, satisfaction, capability expansion, poverty reduction and happiness (Mcgillivray, 2007; Conceição & Bandura, 2008).

However, among well-being theories, there are three essentials ones which are considered in this study: Mainstream Economics, Happiness Economics and The Capability Approach. Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi (2009) worked with these three theoretical references, considering that through this multidimensional approach to well-being, a broader understanding of what really matters to people is possible. The scholars explain that each of these references provides an informational database capable of being used for the construction of a framework to measure social progress. For instance, an economic indicator generally respond only partially whether people's well-being is improving or not. This is the case of GDP, which is used especially by Mainstream Economics. GDP focuses exclusively on the production of goods and services, but does not take into account issues such as income distribution, freedom, the person's ability to achieve a life they value, as well as happiness with the life they take, which are provide by the contribution of Happiness Economics and The Capability Approach.

Nevertheless, there is also a subject that is addressed here because it is relatively little discussed through those three theories: it is about the role of individual responsibility. That is, que question is related to people's duties and how each one is able to contribute to social, economic and human development and also to improve justice and well-being in the world. In the theories presented, a main component stands out: wealth, happiness or freedom. Then, it arises the question if individual responsibility is a valuable ingredient to be studied too?

In this sense, Amartya Sen begins the final chapter of *Development as Freedom* with a theological question: some individuals may wonder how can exist an all-powerful benevolence in a world with so many deprivations, hopeless lives and acute misery. Theologians espouse the idea that God has reasons to let people themselves deal with these and other problems. Sen argues that, even being a nonreligious, he can appreciate the force of this idea that "(...) people themselves must have responsibility for the development and change of the world in which they live" (Sen, 2000, p. 282).

Moreover, in a world where, despite the unprecedented opulence, there is yet a "remarkable deprivation, destitution and oppression", where new problems arise while old ones remain, the role of human agency is central (Sen, 2000, p. 9). Therefore, from individual responsibility's point of view, the idea is to analyze how the development process is consistent with – or result of – the action of each person. That is, the focus of analysis lies in the transforming potential of every man and woman in promoting justice and well-being. According to this logic, if individual responsibility plays an important role – being, at the same time, triggering and catalyzer for social transformation –, than it emerges the question of how address these theme through well-being and how to foster the development through the formation of ethical and responsible citizens.

Therefore, this study has two aims: first, explain the development and objectives of each of the main wellbeing theories; second, address the subject of responsibility related to The Capability Approach. The methodology used was based on an unsystematic literature review on the wellbeing theories.

## 2 The Richer the People, the Higher Their Quality of Life

Mainstream, Orthodox or Neoclassical Economics is the dominant theory in Economics Science, as it is widely accepted and taught in universities around the world, in contrast to heterodox theories. The origin of this tradition is associated with the neoclassical economics, which has the utilitarian philosophy as its basis (Blanchard, 2008; Colander, 2000; Hunt, 2011).

Jeremy Bentham [1748-1832] pioneered the Utilitarianism and Hedonism philosophies in their modern form, which have been the dominant ethical theory adopted by economists such as Mill, Jevons, Sidgwick, Edgeworth, Marshall and Pigou (Sen, 2000). At the beginning of his book *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* [published in 1789], Bentham (2005, p. 11) was peremptory in saying that "[n]ature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*". For Bentham, these two *sovereign masters* govern all acts of individuals in everything they do, in everything they think, and in all ages and places. That is, he reduced human motivation solely to the desire to feel pleasure and avoid pain, which he called the principle of *utility*, from which comes the *Utilitarianism* (Hunt, 2011).

After Jeremy Bentham, the development of utility theory in Economics took place through two interrelated episodes. First, the so-called *Marginal Revolution* in the 1870s, which established the central role of Utility Theory in economic sciences. Second, the so-called *Ordinalist Revolution* in the 1930s, which restricted the use of the term utility, since it couldn't be measured or compared between different people (Cooter & Rapport, 1984). According to Sen (1995, 2000, 2004), Bruni (2006, 2007) and Hunt (2011), utilitarianism is the philosophical basis of modern neoclassical economics, although in the twentieth century many economists have sought to disguise or restrict its bases (from Bentham, Jevons, Menger, Walras) through the terms *choice* (Pareto), *preference* (Hicks) or *rational choice* (Samuelson). Thus, it has provided the foundation for welfare economics commonly taught in Universities.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, William Jevons [1835-1882], Carl Menger [1840-1921] and Leon Walras [1834-1910] modeled, using mathematical tools, the human nature as a rational utility maximizer. Through differential calculus and mathematical methods, they explained the diminishing marginal utility, that is, how the utility provided by the consumption of a good tends to be smaller with each additional unit consumed. Jevons, Menger and Walras have developed a theory of value, based on utility, which still remains the core of microeconomic theory nowadays (Hunt, 2011). In his turn, Francis Edgeworth [1845-1926] pioneered the analysis of indifference curves. Whereas Jevons, Menger and Walras treated consumer's utility as an additive function, Edgeworth introduced a utility function with interdependence between the utilities of each good (Feijó, 2001).

Nevertheless, Vilfredo Pareto [1848-1923] was the one who demonstrated that economics could dispense the pleasure and utility concepts or the selfish and altruistic motives, since the economist may obtain all the information they need just by observing the choices made in the market and the corresponding supply and demand data. That is, Economic Science could be built directly from the facts: psychological data are not needed for Economics, choices are enough, but this idea conflict with Edgeworth, who believed in the notion of utility (Bruni, 2006). In addition, Pareto provided the epistemological basis of modern economic theory by introducing the concept known as *Pareto Efficiency* or *Pareto Optimality*. It is a situation whereby no agent can make its position better off without making at least another one worse off. In other words, the resources of the economy are so well allocated that none reordering is able to improve the condition of any person without getting worse someone else (Feijó, 2001; Hunt, 2011).

Finally, John Richard Hicks [1904-1989], Paul Samuelson [1915-2009], and Roy Allen [1918-1991] are the economists who have developed the economic theory from Pareto to an experimental perspective through the rational choice theory and the revealed preference theory (Bruni, 2002; Feijó, 2001). These changes have some implications for the meaning of utility: the concept that describes mental impulses (marginal utility) was replaced by a behavioral concept (marginal rate of substitution) (Cooter & Rapport, 1984). Furthermore, through the concept of *revealed preferences*, it is no longer necessary to ordering preferences, since consumer behavior is sufficient to determine what will maximize satisfaction (Pindyck & Rubinfeld, 2014; Feijó, 2001).

These latter refinements in behavioral premises of the Orthodox Economics have outweighed the subjectivism present in the theory, whereby utility could be measured and compared as discussed by Jevons, Menger and Walras. Twentieth-century economists have sought to remedy the concepts of psychological hedonism, but in a fashion that they continued to draw the same conclusions regarding the maximizing behavior. Thus, the indifference curves allowed the ordinal quantification of utilities, and cardinal measurements were not necessary anymore. Even more, the word *utility* has been omitted in favor of the word *preference*, since this one can be empirically observed through choices (Feijó, 2001; Hunt, 2011).

Standard economic theory (and decision science) uses an 'objectivist' position based on observable choices made by individuals. Individual utility only depends on tangible factors (goods and services), is inferred from revealed behaviour (or preferences), and is in turn used to explain the choices made. [...] Moreover, the axiomatic revealed preference approach is not only applied to derive individual utility, but also to measure social welfare (Frey & Stutzer, 2000, p. 145).

This *building* of Mainstream Economics has demonstrated that the maximizing behavior of consumers and producers, under competitive conditions, makes society reach optimal levels of well-being. It is also empirically observed according to the ordering of individuals' preferences and their initial allocation of assets (Hunt, 2011). Thus, the higher the individual's income (*initial allocation*), the better they might choose (*preference ordering*) goods and services that provide an increase in their well-being.

To conclude, the Pareto Optimal – which is automatically achieved through the maximizing behavior of consumers and firms in a free market – "(...) represents the unique organization of production, exchange and distribution that leads to the maximum *attainable* social welfare"

(Ferguson, 1969 as cited in Hunt, 2011, p. 381). It happens because the Mainstream Economics considers that welfare depends "(...) only on the relationship between the individual and the object of consumption" (Hunt, 2011, p. 383). This individual, in turn, is understood as calculating, hedonistic and maximizer. Ethical hedonism is the basis of this view. And the ultimate normative principle of the welfare economics is related to the idea that if a person likes something, it is best to have more. It can be stated in several ways:

More pleasure is ethically better than less (Benthamite version); more utility is ethically better than less utility (late nineteenth-century neoclassical version); and a more-preferred position on one's preference ordering is ethically better than a less-preferred position (contemporary neoclassical version) (ibid., p. 383).

Thereby, income, wealth and consumption are conceived as measures of well-being. "Because income correlates with number of choices, greater income is equivalent to higher well-being" (Diener & Seligman, 2004, p. 2). Consequently, metrics related to GDP and income growth, technological advances, industrialization, and so on, tend to define the development of a country (Sen, 2000). On the one hand, there is an evident distinction – initiated through the works of Paul Samuelson in the late 1940s – between the courses of Microeconomics and Macroeconomics (Sandroni, 2004). On the other hand, there is a correlation between the subjects studied in both courses because the fact that the increase of the nation's GDP (*macro*) consequently improves the income conditions of the individuals (*micro*), which allows them to increase consumption. As a fundamental assumption of economic analysis is that welfare is enhanced through the consumption of goods and services; GDP is then considered as a standard of well-being (Conceição & Bandura, 2008).

### 3 When Nothing Matter More than Happiness

The Happiness Economics assess well-being through combining the techniques of economists and psychologists and relies on a broader notion of utility compared to mainstream economics. This kind of research highlights other factors that affect well-being beyond income and consumption, which are adequate to clarify some issues in areas where revealed preferences are limited, such as the social effects of inequality, inflation, and unemployment. Thus, the happiness approach has potential to contribute for policy and to place another view of well-being (Graham, 2008).

In Happiness Economics, well-being is understood as something subjective. Then, subjective well-being is a synonymous of happiness, and it emphasizes individuals' assessment of their own lives, that is, how much they think and feel that their lives are going well. It takes into account four components:

- (i) pleasant emotions (joy, contentment, happiness, love and so on);
- (ii) unpleasant emotions (sadness, anger, worry, stress and so on);
- (iii) global life judgment (life evaluation, fulfilment, meaning, success and so on);
- and (iv) domain satisfaction (marriage, work, health, leisure and so on) (Diener & Seligman, 2004 as cited in Bruni & Porta, 2007, p. xviii).

However, until recently, if a person tells they were happy, skeptics would say that it is only a subjective state, because there is no way to show any objective content on this speech. In contrast, actually there are strictly scientific criteria and the researches are able to measure people's subjective well-being (Layard, 2005). As consequence, economists have been interested to measure happiness, not to define it (Bruni & Porta, 2007). It has been made through questionnaires where people report their happiness, what might be used to analysis the composition of individuals' well-being, and even as a measure of utility. That is, economists who use these data retake the idea – present in Bentham and other economists in the late nineteenth century – that people's utility *can* and *must* be measured, but this time in terms of happiness reported (Frey & Stutzer, 2002a).

It is considered the beginning of the study about happiness in Economic Science, through empirical research, the papers written by the psychologists Brickman and Campbell (1971) and the economist Easterlin (1974). Brickman and Campbell (1971) hooked up the objective living conditions of individuals, such as income and wealth, with their subjective well-being. They concluded that there is a human tendency of quickly return to a certain level of happiness after life events, whatever positive or negative it is. Thus, this finding culminate in the term *hedonic treadmill*: "[t]he nature of [adaptation] condemns men to live on a hedonic treadmill, to seek new levels of stimulation merely to maintain old levels of subjective pleasure, to never achieve any kind of permanent happiness or satisfaction" (ibid, p. 289). Easterlin (1974), in turn, found out that, at any time, rich people are happier than poor people. However, the average happiness reported in the United States between the years 1946-1970 remained stagnant, despite the strong economic growth that occurred in the period. In short, Easterlin recognized that "(...) at any particular time richer individuals are happier than poorer ones, but

over time the society did not become happier as it became richer” (Sachs, 2012, p. 4). This discovery was called *Paradox of Happiness*, also known as *Easterlin Paradox*.

Subsequently, other studies confirmed that, in the long term, economic growth haven't brought greater happiness to individuals on average. Cassiers and Delain (2006) presented a study comparing the evolution of real GDP per capita for several countries and the average happiness reported by their citizens. The authors checked out that happiness has remained stagnant in the United States, Japan, Netherlands, France, Germany and Denmark, with a sharp drop in Belgium and Italy. The study covered the period between 1947 and 2005, when the individual's income have increased quite a lot. Layard (2005) also verified that the happiness reported by people hasn't increased in the United States and Japan for 50 years and in Europe since 1973. Many other studies obtained the same results for these and other countries (Di Tella, Macculloch & Oswald, 2003; Diener & Oishi, 2000; Easterlin, 1995, 2000; Kahneman & Krueger, 2006).

After Easterlin (1974), the Happiness became the subject of other researchers, evolving constantly through the works of Scitovsky (1976), Hirsch (1977), Ng (1978), Layard (1980) and Frank (1985), who added important contributions. In 1993, a symposium on Happiness and Economics was held in London and the studies later published in *The Economic Journal*: Dixon (1997), Frank (1997), Ng (1997) and Oswald (1997). Because of this, “[s]ince the late 1990s, economists have started to contribute large-scale empirical analyses of the determinants of happiness in different countries and periods” (Frey & Stutzer, 2002b, p. 404). During the 2000s, according to Veenhoven (2005), the Happiness and Economy interface has been the subject of more than 3,000 empirical studies already made.

The most common way to know whether people are more or less happy about the life they lead, and insofar as the living standards change, is just *ask them about*, which provides a measure of subjective well-being.

In the last three decades, a large battery of questionnaires and interviews has been applied to representative samples of the populations in many countries, especially among countries with high income per capita, seeking answers about the degree of happiness (high, moderate or low) of individuals related to their life as a whole (Giannetti, 2002, pp. 62-63).

To evaluate happiness, Easterlin (1974, p. 91) has used the following sentence, taken from the *Gallup* database: “[t]aken all together, how would you say things are these

days – would you say that you are *very* happy, *fairly* happy, or *not very* happy?” From the answers, he made a scale: (1) *very happy*, (2) *fairly happy* e (3) *not very happy*, in order to be able to compare the happiness with other variables also presented in the Gallup survey.

Nowadays, the questionnaires configuration remains similar, with one or two questions related to happiness or life satisfaction as a whole, followed by questions about social, political, economic, life-related facts, contemporary events, among others. In the paper of Dolan, Peasgood and White (2008) there is an overview of the main surveys that utilize subjective well-being measures in national or transnational researches, including details about 19 different databases.

In accordance with Frey and Stutzer (2002a), the scientific criteria for evaluating happiness are reliability, validity, consistency and comparability. Frey and Stutzer (2002a) further argue that subjective well-being is moderately stable and adequately sensitive to changes in life circumstances. In addition, the data can be compared with other observations of the same phenomenon. For example, people who report being happier than average are more likely to be evaluated as being happy also by friends, family, and spouses; smile more often during social interactions; are more likely to initiate social contacts and make friends; are more predisposed to respond to requests for help; among other factors.

Therefore, several economists have been using the theoretical structure of Happiness Economics to analyze the determinants of individual well-being and its influence for economic policies. Moreover, Layard (2005) advocates that happiness could be acknowledged as a central goal for society, such that social achievements would be evaluated in accordance with its capacity to increase the individuals' happiness. To this purpose, economic and social policies would have the main objective to foster the determinants of happiness.

Thus, the Happiness Economics retakes the centrality of happiness for society valuation, in such a way that all other objectives should be traced in order to increase that, what means that happiness is understood as the main purpose for well-being.

#### 4 The Key is the Real Opportunities to Do and Be

The Capability Approach is an economic theory conceived as an alternative view to welfare economics and which

has two main normative principles: “first, the claim that the freedom to achieve well-being is of primary moral importance, and second, that freedom to achieve well-being is to be understood in terms of people’s capabilities, that is, their real opportunities to do and be what they have reason to value” (Robeyns & Byskov, 2020, para. 1).

The theoretical development of the Capabilities Approach in recent decades is a resulting of the economist Amartya Sen’s pioneering work [1933 -...] as well as the contribution of the philosopher Martha Nussbaum [1947 -...]. It is possible to trace some features of this approach from Aristotle, Adam Smith, Karl Marx, among others (see Nussbaum, 1992; Sen, 2000; Walsh, 2000). Although, Sen is considered the principal responsible to turn the Capability Approach a theoretical framework used by scholars and politicians in a wide range of fields, being the most prominent those related to development, public and social policies, and economics of well-being (Robeyns & Byskov, 2020). It is interesting to note that the term *capability* first appeared in Sen’s article *Equality of What?* (Sen, 1979), who has been working on this subject since that (for example, Sen, 1995, 2000, 2004).

The theoretical perspective of the Capability Approach is generally conceived as a flexible and versatile structure, rather than a precise theory of well-being. It is a contrast compared to other welfare theories, which focus exclusively on material resources such as income or wealth, or on a subjective structure, such as happiness (Robeyns, 2005; Robeyns & Byskov, 2020). Sen (1995, 2000, 2004, 2009) criticizes the Mainstream Economics and, in a more subtle way, the Happiness Economics, as explained in the next two paragraphs.

For Sen (2000), the well-being in Mainstream Economics is associated to pleasure or satisfaction. The reason it happens is that utilitarianism has been the dominant ethical theory for more than a century. “In the classical, Benthamite form of utilitarianism, the ‘utility’ of a person stands for some measure of his or her pleasure or happiness” (Sen, 2000, p. 58). But he clarifies that “(...) utility is often defined in modern economic analysis as some numerical representation of a person’s observable *choices*” (ibid., p. 59). Sen (2004) explains that utilitarian evaluation is based on three components: consequentialism, welfarism, and sum-ranking. Summarizing these three, it can be said that “any action is judged by the consequent state of affairs (because of consequentialism), and the consequent state of affairs is judged by utilities in that state (because of welfarism)” (Sen, 2000, p. 59). And the utilities of different people are added together, without any consideration to the distribution of this total (because of sum-ranking).

Thus, “(...) injustice consists in aggregate loss of utility compared with what could have been achieved” (ibid., p. 59) and well-being is related to an increase of the utilities or the satisfaction of the desire (Sen, 1995, 2000, 2004). Sen (2000) exposes some disadvantages of the utilitarian approach: first, it is indifferent about distribution of satisfaction, pleasure or happiness, what means that inequality on these subjects is not taking into account. Second, the utilitarianism disregards the rights and freedoms, valuing them only to the extent that they influence utility. Third, it ignores adaptation and mental conditioning, in the sense that peoples’ desires and pleasures are adaptable according to circumstances, especially to make life tolerable in the face of adversity.

On the other hand, it is possible to say that Sen only recently began to discuss the perspective adopted by Happiness Economics. He says that “[t]here is little reason to doubt the importance of happiness in human life, and it is good that the tension between the income perspective and the happiness perspective is, at long last, receiving more mainstream attention” (Sen, 2009, p. 273). It is noted that he understands the Happiness Economics as part of the Mainstream Economics. However, in this case, Sen’s critical is on the idea that some scholars like Layard (2005) argues that happiness must be considered the ultimate goal in society. This statement means that ultimately nothing more matters. Sen (2009, p. 276) stresses that “[h]appiness, important as it is, can hardly be the only thing that we have reason to value, nor the only metric for measuring other things that we value”. On the other hand, he weighs that ‘being happy’ is a functioning that may be recognized quite important, among others: “[t]he perspective of happiness illuminates a critically important part of human life” (ibid., p. 276). That is to say, Sen relativizes the role of happiness in people’s lives. He considers that when individuals fulfill their goals, this often influences the sense of happiness generated by such achievement. In this way, happiness has an indicative merit because it is related to successes and failures of life, even if happiness is not the only thing desired neither the only thing people have reasons to seek.

The conception of well-being presented in the Capability Approach may be understood from Sen (1995, 2000), who explains it through two main concepts: functioning and capability. Functioning refers to states (being) or actions (doing), in other words, it reflects the many things each person deems valuable to be, to do, and to have. “Living may be seen as consisting of a set of interrelated ‘functionings’ (...)” (Sen, 1995, p. 39). Also, the set of functionings range from elementary things such as good health and well nourished, to more complex accomplishments

such as taking part in community activities, being happy, and having self-respect. It is possible to say several examples, but the important thing here is that “(...) an evaluation of well-being has to take the form of an assessment of these constituent elements” (ibid., p. 39), that is, the functionings accomplished by individuals. About the capabilities, these are concerned with the alternative set of functionings whose achievement is feasible. Capability, in this perspective, does not have the ordinary meaning of the term, like being able to do something, but it means the conditions to perform functionings. That is, capability is a kind of substantive freedom, because it reflects the opportunities for choice available to an individual accomplish what they consider important or valuable. According to Sen (1995, p. 41) “[c]hoosing may itself be a valuable part of living, and a life of genuine choice with serious options may be seen to be – for that reason – richer”.

Thus, the Capability Approach proposes that well-being assessment should be associated to two elements: (1) the *functionings accomplished*, which refers to what a person does and be, and; (2) the *capability sets*, which refers to the things that this person is substantive free to do or be. The first one constitutes the elements of well-being, while the second one reflects the freedom to seek these constitutive elements, that is, the real opportunities for well-being (Sen, 1995, 2000). Thus, the freedom to achieve well-being is connected to what people are capable to do and be, and consequently the kind of life they are effectively able to lead. This approach is related to opportunities for achievement, ranging from the basic ones, such as the ability to be well nourished, to more complex ones, such as enjoying supportive social relationships (Robeyns, 2005; Robeyns & Byskov, 2020).

## 5 The Subject of Responsibility May Be Important as Well

The idea of justice advocated by Sen (2009) is hook up with the real opportunities that people have to do and be. The basic consideration is related to the individuals’ ability to lead the kind of life they have reasons to value, a worthy life full of dignity. Sen (2000) identifies freedom as the major goal of development. Similarly, development can be understood as the elimination of deprivations of freedom which limit the functions available to people choose. A good life, for Sen (1995), is a life of genuine and free choices. And quality of life is regarding not only the resources people have, but rather the kind of life they take and the substantive freedoms and opportunities they enjoy (Sen, 2000).

However, one question arises against this evaluation: how can ones be associated to the others’ freedoms and rights? This question relates rights and obligations, and two motives are linked to this. First, some individuals might be the cause of the violation or non-realization of the others’ freedoms. Second, even those who are not agents of such violation, but are able to help, may question what to do in these cases. Sen argues that “(...) people have reason to ask what they should do to help each other in defending or promoting their respective freedoms” (ibid., p. 372). In the other hand, Sen consider it is needed adequate social opportunities in such a way that “individuals can effectively shape their own destiny and help each other” (Sen, 2000, p. 11).

At this point, it is possible to retake the role of responsibility, and its close connection with freedom. Sen (2000, p. 361) states that “[r]esponsibility *requires* freedom” and considers that the linkage between them works both ways. The person is only responsible insofar as they have substantive freedoms and the ability to achieve functions. “In this sense, freedom is both necessary and sufficient for responsibility” (ibid., p. 361).

It might be understood when Sen claims a serious examination about what should be done to help the attainment of other’s freedom. For him, “[t]he necessity to ask that question (rather than to proceed on the possibly comforting assumption that we owe nothing to each other) can be the beginning of a more comprehensive line of ethical reasoning (...)” (Sen, 2009, p. 373). Even though, he points out that “(...) if one *is in a position to do something* effective in preventing the violation of such a right, then one does have a good reason to do just that (...)” (ibid., p. 373, emphasis added). That is, on the one hand Sen emphasizes the aspects of duty. On the other hand, he considers this duty as *ex-post* in relation to capability. He weights that “(...) the move from a *reason* for action (to help another person), which is straightforward enough in a consequence-sensitive ethical system, to an actual *duty* to undertake that action is neither simple, nor sensibly covered under just one straightforward formula” (Sen, 2009, p. 372).

In short, for Sen, the freedom becomes people accountable for what they do. “Since a capability is the power to do something, the accountability that emanates from that ability – that power – is a part of the capability perspective, and this can make room for demands of duty – what can be broadly called deontological demands” (ibid., p. 19).

Nonetheless, Ballet, Dubois and Mahieu (2007) introduce a contradictory voice to this logic. They suggest to reverse the ordering, in such a way that freedom is derived from responsibility. They argue that in real life people commonly first meet their obligations to others and the community with regard to the choices made. For them, freedom *requires* responsibility: "(...) the responsibility to fulfilling obligations is a precondition for real freedom" (ibid., p. 187). Consequently, the authors propose the concept of "strong agency", which includes individual responsibilities.

Sen (2000) also focuses on the condition of agent in his approach of justice-related development. For him, each adult should have their share of responsibility to promote their own well-being and to use their abilities. However, responsibilities may depend on the nature of the social rules and provisions. And how community is structured can be something crucial for the freedoms that people enjoy. Thus, the Estate and civil society play an important role.

From these explanation, it can be deduced that Amartya Sen emphasizes the collective responsibilities, without go further into the nature of individual responsibilities. For him, it comes second since the first place is to provide the person with freedom of choice, because only from this moment they become entitled to the responsibility for their choices.

Similarly, Nussbaum (2011) does not distinguish what is an individual responsibility from what is a collective responsibility. She says that the capabilities approach provides a set of ambitious goals, and soon after asks how to get there. For her, part of the answer lies in the social-institutional structures and the assurance of some constitutional principles. Also, she highlights other important institutions such as families, schools and various organizations, besides some social standards. However, she remains silent on the question of whom precisely must bear the burdens and responsibilities for the realization of those capacities (Robeyns & Byskov, 2020).

For Robeyns and Byskov (2020), a capability theory of justice needs to draw this dividing line where the individual responsibility and collective responsibility are specified. She adds that whatever theory of justice usually defines the rights as well as the duties. Nevertheless, most capability approach' studies and scholars remain in silence about who must assume the task to rise the selected capabilities. "There is a remarkable absence of any discussion about issues of responsibility in the capability literature" (ibid., para. 60).

It may be noted that authors such as Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum point out the relevance of collective and even global responsibility, but do not specify, except succinctly, the role of person responsibilities. On the other hand, they provide an interesting clue about it. This clue lies on the critique of rational choice theory and on the utilitarianism premises of mainstream economy. Sen (1977, 2009) calls Adam Smith's writings to stress that human motivation transcends self-interest: people have different reasons than self-love, such as sympathy, generosity, and public spirit. Sen adds the concept of *commitment* to distinguish it from the concept of sympathy. Both are based on a behavior sensitive to others, but this one can fit into the approach of rational choice theory while that one cannot. Commitment involves moving away from the exclusive pursuit of one's own well-being, for example, when someone behave to reduce or eliminate the misery of others even when it doesn't affect their own well-being.

Sen's debate about commitment and the distinct ways for reasonable behavior is part of all the discussion on rationality he undertakes. Nussbaum (2011, 97), in turn, advances this discussion by bringing the perspective of the emotions and the children's development process: "[a]n account of the emotions of citizens in a decent society is urgently needed (...), how they arise and unfold, what their structure is, and how they interact with one another". In her book *Not For Profit*, she analyses these issues as she aims to comprehend how students become responsible and democratic citizens, who are able to choose well in the face of any national and even global problems. In the opening pages of the chapter III she quotes Mahatma Gandhi, who said that "(...) the political struggle for freedom and equality must first of all be a struggle within each person, as compassion and respect contend against fear, greed, and narcissistic aggression" (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 29). And she finishes the same text saying that "(...) we have to look at two things: the individual, and the situation. (...) So we need, ultimately, to do what Gandhi did and look deeply into the psychology of the individual, asking what we can do to help compassion and empathy win the clash over fear and hate. But situations matter too, and imperfect people will no doubt act much worse when placed in structures of certain types" (ibid., p. 43). Finally, Nussbaum asks what schools have to do to produce citizens for a strong democracy. The answer is: "[p]romote accountability by treating each child as a responsible agent" (ibid., p. 45).

What may be noted from this discussion is that there is indeed a concern about accountability, but there is also a



large gap with respect to the role of individual responsibilities in the space of a capability theory of justice. Both Sen and Nussbaum defend the relevance of democratic deliberation to face the problems of justice. Sen believes that freedom is needed to foster responsibility. Nussbaum (2010, p. 54) corroborates with this idea, but in a more flexible way: “[b]y emphasizing each person’s active voice, we also promote a culture of accountability. When people see their ideas as their own responsibility, they are more likely, too, to see their deeds as their own responsibility”. She also describes how to make citizens responsible, taking education as the guiding for human formation and emotional improvement.

Finally, Sen proposes that people are not only self-interested, but may also be committed with the claims for justice. Nussbaum advances this debate by analyzing the psychology and function of emotions into human behavior. However, the discussion on accountability is not over, there is scope and opportunity for further studies through the areas of Capacity Approach and Human Development.

## 6 Conclusion

“All over the world people are struggling for lives that are worthy of their human dignity” (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 1). How to promote lives that are worthy of their human dignity through development is a concern of many scholars, politicians and citizens around the world. The capability approach deals with this issue. However, in the previous section, it should be noted few studies addressing the subject of accountability. Thus, there is room in the literature to address the duties and responsibilities of each citizen, as well as the dividing line between collective and individual responsibility.

In other words, this paper argues that individual responsibility is an important subject, which is subtly present in the Capacity Approach debates, but that is not deepened. However, this goal seems unlikely to be considered by Orthodox Economics and Happiness Economics. The former is interested in increasing wealth, in economic growth, in market dynamics, which adjust itself to achieve a balance and to maximize well-being. The second evaluates happiness as the great goal, and individual responsibility may only be analyzed insofar as this brings greater happiness to individuals. The Capabilities Approach, due to its broader perspective and its connection with the Theories of Justice and Human Development, could cover the aspect of responsibility in its scope. Therefore, it is suggested that new studies deepen the research about this, including through empirical research. Just as the Ca-

pabilities Approach is tied to issues such as Democracy, Education, Poverty, Health, it could be linked to the Individual Accountability. This would make it possible to understand the role of people to transform the world in order to promote the justice and well-being of the whole population. It would also permit to understand how to foster the development through the formation of ethical and responsible citizens.

Finally, the individual responsibility proposal is a natural consequence of the analysis previously done. This was discussed based on the three well-being theories. On the other hand, future studies could also emphasize or take into account a central aspect to Max Weber’s social thought, it is the methodological individualism. In other words, it is possible to expand the discussion through this interdisciplinary approach with sociology in well-being analysis.

## 7 References

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