

# Well-being as Capabilities and Values

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**Abstract:** In this paper I explore how two theories of well-being can be united to offer a broader and more encompassing take on well-being. Namely, I take the aim of helping others live better lives as a starting point of thinking about well-being and I use the criteria of descriptive and normative adequacy as those that should be considered when discussing it. I assess the capability approach of Martha Nussbaum and the value fulfillment theory supported by Valerie Tiberius. I argue that the capability approach lacks in descriptive adequacy, which the value fulfillment theory compensates for, while the value fulfillment theory faces challenges in practical application which the capability approach provides. I do this by outlining the capability approach as it is defended by Martha Nussbaum, together with the list of central human capabilities and some important characteristics of the approach. I then point to some blind spots of the capability approach and examples that support my claim. Next, my attention shifts towards the value fulfillment theory by Valerie Tiberius where I present the main tenants of it and its favorable characteristics. Lastly, I show that the theories elegantly come together to form a wider framework of well-being that is more explanatorily potent and could be more helpful than each theory on their own.

**Keywords:** well-being, value fulfillment, capability approach, values, capabilities, normative, descriptive

## **1. Introduction**

What it means to live a good life is one of the oldest philosophical problems going back all the way to the Ancient Greeks. While many of the theories in the discussion stem from that time, the discussion has been undergoing a revival, and rightfully so, since the contemporary world looks little like the one of the Ancients and is marked by daunting challenges as well as with considerable advances in thought, science and the quality of life around the globe. The discussion has been reintroduced under the heading of „Well-being“ and it tries to answer „what is non-instrumentally or ultimately good for a person.“ (Crisp, 2017) Other synonymous formulations of the notion of well-being are: „welfare, self-interest, one’s interests, one’s advantage, one’s good, prudential value, quality of life, flourishing, or the good life.“ (Campbell, 2016, The concept of well-being, para. 4)

The theories of well-being are traditionally divided into objective and subjective theories. One of the influential objective theories is endorsed by Martha Nussbaum (2001) under the headline of the capability approach while Valerie Tiberius (2018) proposes a subjective theory called the value fulfillment theory. The former can be characterized as an objective list theory which considers what people are capable of doing and being, while the latter places importance on values meaning that well-being consisting in living lives rich in value fulfillment.

In this paper I take as a starting point the aim of helping ourselves and others live good lives, together with the criteria theories of well-being should rely on, namely, the criterion of descriptive adequacy which states that theories of well-being should account for as many cases of well-being as possible, and the criterion of normative adequacy which states that the theories should provide us with reasons to pursue what they recommend. I argue that

considering these criteria, the two theories work best when they are combined. Specifically, the capability approach as an objective list with perfectionist elements serves as a good foundation for providing well-being at the level of the state and the perfectionist elements make it normatively adequate. However, it fails to capture certain important aspects of well-being which makes Nussbaum's theory descriptively inadequate. The value fulfillment theory remedies the shortcomings of the capability approach by accounting for various cases which the capability approach does not capture and it provides guidelines for our everyday lives of helping those close to us. However, its application can be problematic in devising public policies and helping people outside our social circles. Thus, the theories satisfy the criteria better when their elements are combined than each of them does so individually.

I proceed as follows. First, I lay out the criteria for theories of well-being and the aim of their practical application. Then, I present the capability approach as is supported by Martha Nussbaum together with her list of central human capabilities. Next, I evaluate its normative adequacy and point to some blind spots when it comes to descriptive adequacy. After that, I outline the value fulfillment theory supported by Valerie Tiberius and show how it compensates for the shortcomings of the capability approach. I also note some problems it has and how the capability approach atones for them. Finally, I demonstrate these theories coming together, their combination being superior to each of the theories on their own.

### **1.1. The starting point of the discussion**

As a starting point of thinking about well-being I think we should keep close eye on its practical application, meaning that our theories are informative and applicable in the everyday. Specifically, I think we should aim at the prospect of helping ourselves and others

live better lives. That is the notion which is in the background of this paper and this is how Valerie Tiberius expresses this point:

We should think about our aims (such as helping others and being happy ourselves) and our commitments (to the importance of happiness and autonomy, for example), and we should evaluate our theory by how well it helps to guide us, given these starting points. (2018, 1.4. Why this theory?, para. 2)

In addition, given the practical aims of a theory of well-being, Tiberius, following Sumner (1996) offers three reasonable criteria that theories of well-being should satisfy:

1) Descriptive adequacy – “a theory of well-being should capture (or at least not be at odds with) as many as possible of our ordinary judgments about who has well-being and who doesn't.” (2018, Why this theory?, para. 4)

2) Normative adequacy – “(...) well-being theories should be adequate to explain the value of well-being and why we have good reason to pursue it or why we have good reason to follow the recommendations of the theory“ (Tiberius, 2018, Why this theory?, para. 5)

3) Empirical adequacy – well-being theories should be compatible with our best understanding of how the world works (...) [the criterion of empirical adequacy] demands that insofar as philosophical theories make empirical assumptions, or generate predictions that rely on empirical assumptions, those assumptions are well-founded.“ (Tiberius, 2018, Why this theory?, para. 7)

In this paper I focus on the descriptive and normative adequacy of the theories I aim to investigate. A thorough exploration of the empirical adequacy of both theories is well beyond the scope of this paper. Thus, I want to take these two criteria, together with the starting point of helping others to be my north star throughout this paper.

## **2. The capability approach**

The capability approach, as advocated by Martha Nussbaum (2001), is an approach to well-being that considers what people are able to do and be and aims at providing them with the opportunities to achieve that. It is a project that can be subsumed under the domain of moral and political philosophy, but it is more far-reaching than that, having its impact on economics, sociology, law and policy making. It is best described as a multidisciplinary framework. As such, the capability approach has two things on its agenda: a comparative assessment of the quality of life and the development of a theory of basic or minimal social justice. (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 46)

In other words, it aims to provide reliable measuring tools for determining the quality of life and build a theoretical account of social justice which can serve as a floor plan for governments to implement it. This is also where the interdisciplinarity of the project comes to the forefront since developing measurement tools is (traditionally) less philosophical and more empirically based work. Nussbaum mostly focuses on the development of a theory of minimal social justice as she describes it:

The aim of the project as a whole is to provide the philosophical underpinning for an account of basic constitutional principles that should be respected and implemented by the governments of all nations, as a bare minimum of what respect for human dignity requires. (2001, p. 5)

The capability approach is concerned with what people are actually able to do and be, i.e. what they are *capable* of being and doing, or as Nussbaum alternatively formulates it: „a set of (usually interrelated) opportunities to choose and to act“ (Nussbaum, 2011, The Central Capabilities, para. 7). In contrast with some other theories of well-being that take pleasure, happiness, GDP, employment rates as indicative of well-being, it takes people's actual opportunities and abilities – capabilities, as the official currency of well-being.

### **2.1. The characteristics of the capability approach**

One important dichotomy of the capability approach is the one between functionings and capabilities in which functionings are actual 'doings and beings' while capabilities are opportunities or potential that can be realized by translating them into functionings. Or, as Robeyns puts it: „Functionings are various states of human beings and activities that a person can undertake. (...) Capabilities are person's real freedoms or opportunities to achieve functionings.“ (Robeyns, 2016)

For example, health insurance enables you to go to the doctor when you're ill, to receive medical attention in case of accidents, to get prescription medication and most of that is covered by the insurance. You are provided with the capability of taking care of your health and if in fact you must use some of those things, you are turning those capabilities into functionings.

To fully appreciate the advantages of the capability approach it is best to take into consideration its advantages over other theories of well-being. Traditionally, there are two types of objective theories of well-being; the objective list and perfectionism. The objective

list is a theory which usually posits a list of things that are good for a person and goes on to justify the items it contains. The thing that all objective lists have in common is the attitude-independence criterion which states that “at least some things are good for agents even if the agent does not desire them.” (Fletcher 2016, Objective lists, para. 4, 2016) This property of objective lists stands against the arguments directed towards subjective theories, namely, addressing the problem that psychological states might not track the relevant human experiences. However, this leaves objective lists vulnerable to the alienation objection which consists in the fact that „we are reluctant to insist that something is good for someone if that individual would not, even upon reflection, agree with that assessment and is thus resiliently alienated from that claim about what is good for him“ (Yelle, 2014, p. 368). Here is where the capability approach offers a solution in differentiating between capabilities and functionings since having capabilities leaves people to choose how and when they want to achieve whichever functioning they like. Thus, they are not detached from the things that actually do make a difference to their well-being.

Another challenge that objective lists face is arbitrariness, or as Fletcher formulates it „the theories are problematically arbitrary, nothing but an ‘unconnected heap’, or somehow explanatorily unsatisfying.“(Fletcher, 2016, Objections to objective list theories, para. 2) The difficulty lies in theories having to explain both each item on the list individually *and* the whole list which more often than not seems arbitrarily assembled, here are examples of such lists:

**Finnis** Life, knowledge, play, aesthetic experience, sociability (friendship), practical reasonableness, “religion.”

**Fletcher** Achievement, friendship, happiness, pleasure, self-respect, virtue.

**Murphy** Life, knowledge, aesthetic experience, excellence in play and work, excellence in agency, inner peace, friendship and community, religion, happiness.

**Parfit** Moral goodness, rational activity, development of abilities, having children and being a good parent, knowledge, awareness of true beauty. (Fletcher, 2015, Just what are objective lists?, para. 4)

Nussbaum's capability approach evades this problem with its' elements of perfectionism. Perfectionism is a theory of well-being which can be, in a broad sense, formulated as such: "The good life for a human is determined by human nature. Human nature involves a specific set of capacities. The exercise and development of these capacities is good for humans." (Fletcher, 2016, Perfectionism about human well-being, para. 2) It is a theory that looks at what is common to all of us and tries to draw conclusions from that. It elegantly fits into the capability approach since it ties all of the items on the list together through what Nussbaum refers to as the Neoaristotelian essentialist proposal, which is an "account of the most important functions of the human being, in terms of which human life is defined.", and which asks "what the most central features of our common humanity *are*, without which no individual can be counted as human." (1992, p. 215) In clarifying the rationale behind her theory, she indicates two facts – one is that "we do recognize others as human across many divisions of time and place.(...) we are rarely in doubt whether we are dealing with a human being or not", and the second is that " we do have a broadly shared general consensus about the features whose absence means the end of a human form of life." (Nussbaum, 1992, p. 215)

Therefore, Nussbaum's capability approach, viewed as a kind of objective list with an element of perfectionism succeeds at evading the usual objections directed towards objective lists and

makes it a preferable choice for a theory of well-being, or at least for a foundation of one, which I will elaborate on later.

Nussbaum proposes the following list of central human capabilities:

1. Life. Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
2. Bodily health. Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.
3. Bodily integrity. Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.
4. Senses, imagination, and thought. Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason-and to do these things in a "truly human" way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid nonbeneficial pain.
5. Emotions. Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional

development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.)

6. Practical reason. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance.)
7. Affiliation. (A) Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.) (B) Having the social bases of self-respect and nonhumiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of nondiscrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin.
8. Other species. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.
9. Play. Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.
10. Control over one's environment. (A) Political. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association. (B) Material. Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers. (2001, pp. 78-79)

Nussbaum highlights the perfectionist element in saying that “The Aristotelian essentialist claims that a life that lacks any one of these, no matter what else it has, will be lacking in humanness”(1992, p. 222)

She gives special significance to two of these capabilities, namely, affiliation and practical reason, considering them as “architectonic, holding the whole enterprise together and making it human.” (Nussbaum 1992, p. 222) Her rationale is that these two are important for the development of all other capabilities; affiliation is important for social integration and life in a community while practical reason is critical in choosing among capabilities and figuring out which ones to turn into functions and how.

Further, Nussbaum is not a fan of concessions between capabilities as they are 'irreducibly heterogeneous' meaning that an abundance of one capability does not remedy the lack of another. (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 79) Related is the notion that all capabilities should be brought to a certain threshold of capabilities which ensures and maintains human dignity.

Additionally, all capabilities should be provided for each and every citizen. Unlike some other theories, namely, those that take family as a unit of social justice, the capability approach takes pride in its *each person's capability principle* which states that: “the capabilities sought are sought for each and every person, not, in the first instance, for groups or families or states or other corporate bodies.” (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 74)

Lastly, the capabilities are intended to be a matter of an “overlapping consensus among people who otherwise have very different comprehensive conceptions of the good.” (Nussbaum 2001, p. 5) This is inspired by John Rawls' ideas in “Political Liberalism“ (1996)

and it means that the capabilities are proposed in a way that people of different backgrounds, cultures, nationalities and 'conceptions of good' could agree upon them.

## **2.2. Evaluating the capability approach**

Before evaluating the capability approach against the two criteria mentioned in the beginning of this paper I want to make a concession. The capability theory by Martha Nussbaum belongs to the realm of political philosophy, as an alternative theoretical construction to the human rights and, as such, it could be argued that it is not a theory of well-being per se. Even so, I take Nussbaum's capability theory in its theoretical foundations and treat it as a kind of a theory of well-being since, as I have showed earlier, it has many advantages over the alternatives but it is also not too far removed from a traditional objective list theory. I will now turn to the criteria proposed in the beginning, namely, descriptive and normative adequacy.

Normative adequacy, as I have previously mentioned, consists in explaining the value of well-being and why we would want to pursue it. (Tiberius, 2018) When it comes to the capability theory, its' normative pull can be derived from its' perfectionist elements. It can be argued that we have a good reason to value having capabilities, as well as procuring them to others, because it enables us in living a life that is characteristically human, or worthy of human dignity. Its' strength lies in securing various forms of human endeavor but in a way that leaves room for each person to choose how they want to realize them, i.e. how they want to turn their capabilities into functionings.

Even if we put aside the perfectionist element or deem it unconvincing, it seems to me to be uncontroversial to claim that we should secure basic capabilities like life, bodily integrity,

bodily health, practical reason, etc. for living a good life. More than that I think the capabilities are prerequisites for living a good life which I will get back to shortly.

Nussbaum's capability approach lacks descriptive adequacy which demands that a theory of well-being accounts for as many as possible ordinary judgments about whose life is going well for them and whose is not. (Tiberius, 2018) The problem of the capability approach is that it is not responsive to some subjective aspects of well-being.

The capability approach, as I have mentioned, is essential to helping the socially, politically and economically disadvantaged. However, if we look at the situations in the developed world, specifically, to people who have most of their capabilities taken care of close or over the threshold, there are severe differences in their well-being from their own point of view. The people I encounter daily in my life differ greatly with respect to how they feel from the inside, how they think their life is going and how satisfied they are with their lives. The danger of their basic capabilities being compromised is really not that probable. Their human and civil rights are respected to a large extent and they are reaping the benefits of living in the free society. However, some of them are less satisfied with their lives, some are deeply troubled, some are constantly unhappy while others are fulfilled.

Let me illustrate this with an example, taken from Tiberius's Well-being as Value fulfillment (2018):

Sander is a gay man who is also a member of the Church of Latter Day Saints, which does not accept homosexuality. Sander wants to have romantic relationships with men, but he is also deeply committed to his faith and has a personal connection with God that sustains him. His commitment to the Church gives meaning to his life and also binds him to what he takes to be a community

of loving, like-minded people. He does not think that Church doctrine about homosexuality is correct, but he also doesn't think they will come around to the right view in his lifetime. Sander has thought about leaving the Church to make it easier to live as a gay man, but has been drawn back to it. Instead of leaving the Church, Sander participates in a Mormon LGBT advocacy group and blogs about being gay in the Mormon Church. He decides to live with the conflict but it isn't easy. He's not permitted in the Temple, some other members of the Church shun him, and the friends he meets who are more accepting of his sexual orientation do not understand the importance of the Church in his life. (Tiberius, 2018, Maxine, Sander and Jules, para. 4)

This is a case that is not that uncommon in everyday life when we simultaneously want and care about things which are not mutually compatible. What is important about this case is that things Sander cares much about are so severely conflicted that it poses significant problems in his life.

Still, this situation does not impede on Sander's capabilities. The proponents of the capability approach could not argue that Sander's capabilities are in danger without trespassing on the important notions of religious freedoms and freedom of association the capability approach promises, but also could not claim that Sander's problem does not have a negative impact on Sander's well-being. Thus, the capability approach seems to be blind to some important aspects of well-being.

Sander has both the capability of religious freedom and sexual integrity. He can choose either of the two. If we want to keep the universality or 'overlapping consensus' of the capability

approach by preserving religious freedoms, we are forced to say that Sander's capabilities are not impaired. But then, the capability approach faces the challenge of being insufficient to account for people's well-being.

One could argue that Sander lacks the capability to both honor his religion and have his bodily integrity but if that capability should exist it is certainly not one of the central basic ones and it would be too demanding to procure it. That would mean that there should be gay-friendly versions of all religions as a capability which would be rather strange.

Further, I would argue that he has a problem on his hands which is worth taking into consideration underserving of eye rolls, scoffs or being dismissive in general. This is a problem that undoubtedly has a negative effect on Sander's well-being as he is torn between things that he deeply cares about.

If we refer back to the criteria we want our theory of well-being to satisfy, this would mean that we either admit that the capability approach is descriptively inadequate as it fails to include situations in which people's well-being is impaired but their capabilities are not, or we would have to give up the overlapping consensus about capabilities and end up with serious problems of paternalism. I would argue the former which is why I think the capability approach could greatly benefit from a subjective theory that would account for the differences above the threshold.

Granted, this can be viewed not as a flaw in the capability approach that Nussbaum has overlooked but a thing she was anticipating. Nussbaum differentiates between two thresholds: “a threshold of capability to function, beneath which a life will be so impoverished that it will

not be human at all, and a somewhat higher threshold, beneath which those characteristic functions are available in such a reduced way that although we may judge the form of life a human one, we will not think it a *good* human life.” (Nussbaum, 1992, p. 221)

We can see that Nussbaum postulates a transition in capabilities from non-human to human life, and then from a human life to a good human life. Nussbaum specifically states that “we do not want our societies to be capable of the bare minimum” (Nussbaum 1992, 221) meaning that we would want our citizens to be capable of much more than that akin to real human flourishing. She emphasizes that the “move from a human life to a good human life is supplied by the citizens’ own powers of choice and self-definition, in such a way that when society places them above the first threshold, moving above the second is more or less up to them.” (1992, 221)

This means that the role of society is to secure the capabilities that enable people to live truly human lives and to choose among capabilities ones that they want to turn into functions and how. An important thing to note is that much of the development beyond the threshold of the capabilities is up to citizens themselves since the capability approach is aimed at procuring well-being through political action at the state level and is thus constrained from making or enforcing views about well-beings on its citizens.

Nussbaum herself does not provide guidelines for this but this leaves the door open for a theory which would account for, explain and give guidance to people once they have their central capabilities met. This is where the value fulfillment theory comes in.

### **3. The value fulfillment theory**

The value fulfillment theory is a subjective theory which takes people's values – what they care about, consider important in how their life is going, as the central psychological state to

focus on in constructing a theory of well-being. As can be seen from this, her theory belongs to the subjective camp and in contrast with other theories that take pleasure, desire, authentic happiness etc., values have some favorable characteristics that set them apart.

### **3.1. What are values?**

Tiberius takes values to be “things we care about, things that are important to us, things that we organize our lives around.” (para. 1.3 The focus on value and the value fulfillment theory in the nutshell). According to her, to value something “is to have a relatively stable pattern of emotional, motivational, and cognitive dispositions or tendencies toward what is valued.” (para. 1.3. the focus... )

As an example, let's take John who values friendship. John wants to hang out with his friends and makes time to catch up with them. He is thrilled when he makes plans with them and gets sad when their plans are cancelled. In figuring out where he wants to spend holidays, vacation or birthday he takes them into account and arranges his plans so they could all go and have fun. (His friends do the same for him) John's value of friendship is relatively stable throughout his life, it is motivating for him and directs his actions, it has an emotional component and it has a place in his planning, judging, deliberation and so on.

Additionally, to value something is “to judge that it is the kind of thing that is good in some way.” (Tiberius 2018, what are values, para. 3) or in other words, values are reason-generating for us. Values are thought to include some kind of judgment of justification as to why we endorse them. In short, values are normative for us; they are self-imposed standards which we are trying to live up to. I will get back to this bit shortly. To conclude, values include

emotions, desires, and judgment, they are relatively stable and are normative for us. (Tiberius 2018)

Values are linked together in a system of values in which some values are more central, others peripheral, some are intrinsic, other are instrumental. In this, values are like the capabilities since the greater fulfillment of one value does not entail the greater overall value fulfillment.

One of the greatest challenges for subjective theories is to make someone's well-being depend on psychological states of the individual while at the same time finding a way to criticize and leave room for improvement of those same states. That is why Tiberius includes a notion of 'appropriate values' in her theory that serve as a regulatory ideal in assessing one's values. Appropriate values are those that are well-integrated in the individual meaning that they are motivationally, emotionally and cognitively aligned.

Additionally, values exist on a continuum of appropriateness – being closer or further away from the ideal of an appropriate value. Specifically, as Tiberius puts it, appropriate values are: “1) suited to our desires and emotions, 2) reflectively endorsed, 3) capable of being fulfilled together over time.” (2018, What are values?, para. 10)

Let us consider for example family, which is often a core value in people's lives. Tiberius considers it to be an appropriate value for many people since we usually want the best for the members of our family, we are happy to see them and spend time with them, it makes sense to value family as they are most of the time happy to provide us safe haven. It is also a relatively stable value as it is often a centerpiece in our lives, we do not have problems justifying our commitments to family, and we make effort in our lives to fulfill it and tend to organize our

lives with our family in mind. Even if our value of family sometimes clashes with our other values like meaningful work or leisure time, we tend to make sure that it is capable of being fulfilled with other values over time.

According to the value fulfillment theory, well-being consists in „the fulfillment of appropriate values over time“.(Tiberius, 2018, What is value fulfillment?, para. 2), or in other words “overall well-being consists in total value fulfillment: the ultimate goal is a life as rich in value fulfillment as it could be” (Tiberius, 2018, The value fulfilled life and the long-term perspective, para. 5)

It is important to recognize that values are not static and they tend to change, become more or less appropriate throughout life. For example, valuing partying with your drinking buddies is probable to become less and less appropriate as you age since it might start to clash with your work responsibilities or with being a parent (both of which you start value more). There is also an example of starting to value your own health and physical activity more and as a result taking up yoga or running. At first, you might not like it, consider it tiresome and boring but after a while you might start liking it more and more.

Moreover, values bring with them certain standards of success, some of them being societally and culturally enforced, while others may be our own standards. (Tiberius, 2018) In light of these standards, we judge how well we are doing in fulfilling our values.

If John stole money from his friends, made fun of them and slept with their girlfriends he would not fulfill the standards of being a good friend or valuing friendship. To a large extent, that is a culturally and socially endorsed standard. However, if John liked running and

considers running his favorite pastime there would not be standards of success besides the ones he sets for himself, for example, that he enjoys it or that he challenges himself. (If he were a professional athlete, or just a competing one, there would be standards he would have to meet that are enforced from the outside)

### **3.2. Evaluating the value fulfillment theory**

Concerning the criteria of descriptive adequacy, the value fulfillment theory accounts for and explains a wide range of cases and, in that sense, it may be superior to the Nussbaum's capability approach. The lack of well-being in those who are less fortunate or underprivileged (lacking capabilities) can be explained in terms of inability to live a life rich in value fulfillment, while the example of Sander and his disruption of well-being can also be accounted for and his predicament explained in terms of conflicted values and an contradictory value system.

When it comes to normative adequacy, the value fulfillment theory seems to fulfill the criterion since the criterion states that "well-being theories should be adequate to explain the value of well-being and why we have good reason to pursue it or why we have good reason to follow the recommendations of the theory" (Tiberius, 2018, Why this theory?, para. 5). The value fulfillment theory fulfills this in an almost trivial way since values are, by definition, the things we care about, and it seems uncontroversial to claim that we have good reason to pursue the things we care about. The question that presents itself is then: why do we want both theories, why not just the value fulfillment theory?

## **4. Capabilities and Values**

### **4.1. Why both theories? Why not just either of the two?**

A compelling reason is the aim I have explicated in the beginning of the paper, that in discussing well-being we should keep in mind the idea of helping ourselves and others live better lives. Tiberius's theory gives guidelines in helping ourselves and those that are close to us and that we care about, the people we have some kinds of relationships with. In that, I think the value fulfillment theory can prove to be truly helpful. However, when it comes to developing a further-reaching theory that would affect people at the state level things do not look as promising for the value fulfillment theory. Value systems are complex, and it would be highly unpractical and problematic to devise public policy based on them. Further, people's values differ, their priorities, relations between them differ, some people are unaware of what they value, or they value incompatible things and so on. This is where I think the capability approach comes in hand with its' dichotomy between capabilities and functionings because it is dedicated to providing opportunities for people to realize whatever they value and in whichever way they want.

Therefore, the capability approach has the advantage over the value fulfillment theory with regards to helping people at the level of the state, policy making and providing basic needs to all citizens. However, once people are over the capabilities' threshold their problems and worries become so diverse that they can benefit the most from the individual, case-by-case approach which the value fulfillment theory provides guidance for.

#### **4.2. Capabilities as prerequisites for value fulfillment**

As I have mentioned earlier, it could be argued that capabilities are prerequisites for value fulfillment which is something I think Tiberius would also agree upon as she claims herself that:

We should focus on helping others to secure the necessary conditions for maintaining commitments to values and pursuing a value-fulfilled life. This recommendation is not out of line with well-established views about how to improve global well-being that emphasize the need to focus on primary goods or basic human capabilities that are required for functioning. (...)The capabilities approach could guide us into thinking about which values are important to most people, and therefore what forms of aid would be genuinely helpful. (Tiberius 2018)

According to this, Tiberius wouldn't have a problem with accepting the capability approach. Another such indication can be seen in her *Substance and procedure in theories of prudential value* (2007) where she argues that: "Elements of both subjective and objective theories are needed for a comprehensive theory of prudential value that results from the thorough application of reflective equilibrium." (Tiberius, 2007, p. 374) One of the theories she is using as an example of a substantive theory is Nussbaum's capability approach. She concludes the paper by saying that procedural and substantive theory can be compatible which is basically what I am arguing for in this paper.

Further, there are points at which these two theories can come together:

Many of the values people have are socially sanctioned, highly stable, and abstract enough that how they are fulfilled is open to interpretation. For example: health, pleasure, close family ties, friendship, comfort, security and achievement. These values are quite likely to be the best part of any of the best lives a person could live (though particular means for them will vary) and therefore they form an

excellent basis for well-being assessment. (Tiberius, 2018, Informational and Interpersonal Challenges, para. 2)

Here we see that Tiberius and Nussbaum arrive to similar conclusions from two opposite poles of the debate. Nussbaum starts from the objective side thinking about what people should be provided under the notion of human dignity and arrives at the list which looks quite similar to what Tiberius proposes here. Conversely, Tiberius starts from the subjective side thinking about what people care about and what they consider important while reflecting on whether it makes sense to value those things and arrives at the similar point.

#### **4.3. The interconnectedness of values and capabilities**

I assume that what people value has a lot to do with how and what capabilities they would choose to turn into functions. Presumably, values serve as a driving-force and as such direct people towards particular functionings while capability approach ensures that those functionings are realizable.

Having values means caring about different things while capabilities are opportunities to realize what you care about. Capabilities are concerned with what people are able to do and be while values are concerned with what care about being and doing. Basically, one chooses which capabilities to turn into functionings depending on, or at least keeping their values in mind.

They are also interconnected in that capabilities in part determine what values it makes sense for us to have. For example, imagine a person who has had irreversible damage to their spine and ends up disabled. Before the accident, they were a professional marathon runner. Even

though they valued their career as a runner, physical activity, going beyond one's limits, etc. it would be best if they could somehow change their value system or rearrange it since their previous values would not lead to a life rich in value fulfillment. They lost some of the important capabilities to fulfill their values which is a tragic thing but such situations are, unfortunately, not that rare.

With that in mind, perhaps we can assume that changes in capabilities can bring about changes in values. If we think of the famous Nussbaum's example of Vasanti, an Indian woman who started off in an abusive marriage with an alcoholic husband, left her husband, asked help from her former family, started a sewing business and is now a part of Self-employed Women's association (SEWA) helping other women do the same. I presume that such transition probably brought about changes within her value system or maybe different ways of realizing the same values, for example, the value of nurturing and taking care of others. As her opportunities and possibilities started opening up for her, she started caring about different things. We can see how these two theories can be observed as interdependent and being more explanatorily potent than each on their own.

#### **4.4. Evaluating their adequacy**

Concerning the descriptive adequacy, I think these two theories in unison cover a wide range of cases that are evocative of well-being and they provide an account of well-being that is wider and further-reaching than each theory on its own. They can also offer explanations as to why someone's well-being might be hindered and point into direction in which one is to go if they want to help.

Further, normative adequacy seems to be further strengthened when the theories are combined. The capability approach bases its normative adequacy in appealing to our conception of what it is, means and entails to be human and, in light of that, deals with what people are able to do and be. It propagates providing each and every citizen capabilities that are integral to basic human dignity. This is only enhanced by Tiberius's account of living a life of value fulfillment in which we are, by definition, fulfilling the things we care about. I think it is evident why we would have 'good reason to pursue' the things we care about, i.e. value.

Combined, they are set on exploring and enabling opportunities or capabilities, i.e. beings and doings, to the threshold of human dignity so that people can lead value fulfilled lives – lives rich in doings and beings they care about.

## **5. Conclusion:**

In this paper I have argued that the capability approach laid out by Martha Nussbaum and the value fulfillment theory by Valerie Tiberius should be combined. In fact, in assessing and constructing a theory of well-being we must pay attention to the importance of helping ourselves and others in leading good lives together with some criteria that are important for a theory of well-being to satisfy. In this work I have considered two of these criteria – descriptive and normative adequacy and assessed these theories through their requirements. I showed that the suggested combination of these theories satisfies these requirements and provides a theoretical framework that would be able to assess and aid the well-being of people in all kinds of life situations.

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