Doctoral Dissertation

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"Towards a Pragmatic Capability Approach: Essays on human development, agency and pragmatism"

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To Numa and Anita, my parents.
This is as much yours as it is mine.
Thank you.

To my family,
those who were,
those who are,
those who will be

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Acknowledgements

Taking this project to a safe harbor has entailed quite a journey. Along the way I have felt the excitement of setting sail, faced the deluge of uncertainty, the anxiety of being adrift, the encouragement of finding the path and the solace of seeing land. The adventure has made clear to me that this journey is best made accompanied. I might not have been to do it alone. Bringing this project to fruition was only possible because of the different kinds and degrees of support given to me by a wide array of people. This has been particularly so during the last months of elaboration of this dissertation, which coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Abstract

Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (CA) makes an important contribution to the development literature. It moves from the conventional focus on a single indicator: opulence, to an emphasis on people, their plurality, and the multiple dimensions characterizing their quality of life. As such, it proposes an influential account of human beings and their agency. Its advantages notwithstanding, its notion of agency seems to warrant in depth scrutiny.

This dissertation explores the actual scope of the CA's agency as well as its limitations, and suggests a way to complement it. An account of the capabilitarian agent encompasses two elements: freedom or choice and rationality or reasoning. Thus, the CA rejects the conventional rational agent, advancing instead a *reasoning* one. As such, the CA's agency seems to require attention to measurement and explanation (observables) as well as to meaning and interpretation (unobservables), which demands moving beyond a positivistic philosophy of science. At the same time, it is found that this notion seems to leave people who have others choosing and reasoning for them unaccounted for.

To provide a complement the CA on both counts, John Dewey's pragmatism is proposed. It is a philosophy that provides an account of how people think and act. The elaboration of pragmatic agency is carried out from philosophical ontology. Pragmatism is located within the analyticist philosophy of science, as it adheres to mind-world monism and phenomenalism. While the former is evidenced in its concept of transaction, suggesting the mutual constitution of humans and their contexts, the latter is evidenced in its attention to objects, which are anything that a person notices (including in-principle unobservables). The meanings of objects are expressed in terms of action and depend on habits, which are predispositions for actions and, as such, more intimate and informative than choices. Pragmatism, therefore, encompasses more than reflective action.. Accounting for the pragmatic *transagent*, thus, requires the scrutiny of objects and habits, which implies the inclusion of meaning and interpretation.

Consequently, it is found that the CA's reasoning agent can benefit from the inclusion of in-principle unbservables by dint of pragmatic objects and habits, enhance the elements constituting individuals with these same elements, make sense of the nature and function of values and preferences, and enrich its account of the relation between individuals and

their context by dint of pragmatic transaction. Therefore, the pragmatic transagent can account for the groups dropped by the CA. Additionally, pragmatism can complement the CA in other aspects. Concerning ontology, while the CA has abstained from addressing ontological issues, pragmatism is found to adhere to an analyticist philosophy of science, which seems to agree with the CA's reasoning agent and its constituting elements: choice (observables) and reasoning (unobservables). As for empirical issues, the CA has supported its flexibility on a lay understanding of pragmatism, since it seems to maintain positivist traces. Subscribing to it philosophically could prove beneficial.

Apropos of freedom, pragmatism's naturalist philosophy can contribute to alleviate the CA's focus on choice and to account for the continuity of behavior, encompassing non-reflective as well as reflective action, seemingly the main focus of the CA. With respect to democracy, pragmatism casts a wider net than the CA applying democracy to all levels of human association, not only society or the state, which seems to be the CA's concern. Finally, as regards normativity, although both are consequentialist, while the CA holds freedom and achievement as the end, pragmatism advances solely action. These are not incompatible positions. To the extent that the CA can further action, a pragmatic capability approach can accommodate regarding development as freedom.

Resumen

El Enfoque de Capacidad (EC) de Amartya Sen hace una importante contribución a la literatura del desarrollo. Se mueve del enfoque convencional en un único indicador: opulencia, a un énfasis en la gente, su pluralidad, y las múltiples dimensiones que caracterizan su calidad de vida. Así, propone una explicación de los seres humanos y su agencia. Sin perjuicio de sus ventajas, su noción de agencia parece merecer estudio a profundidad.

Esta disertación explora el alcance real de la agencia del EC así como sus limitaciones, y sugiere una forma de complementarla. Una elaboración del agente capacitario abarca dos elementos: libertad o elección y racionalidad o razonamiento. Así, el EC rechaza al agente racional convencional y promueve uno *razonante*. Por tanto, la agencia del EC parece requerir atención a la medición y explicación (observables) así como al significado e interpretación (inobservables), lo que demanda moverse más allá de una filosofía de la ciencia positivista. Al mismo tiempo, se encuentra que esta noción parece dejar gente que tiene a otros eligiendo y razonando por ellos sin explicación.

Para brindar un complemento al EC en ambos aspectos, se propone el pragmatismo de John Dewey. Es una filosofía con una propuesta de cómo la gente piensa y actúa. La elaboración de la agencia pragmática se hace desde la ontología filosófica. El pragmatismo se ubica como una filosofía de la ciencia analiticista pues adopta el monismo mente-mundo y el fenomenalismo. Mientras el primero se evidencia en su concepto de transacción, sugiriendo una mutua constitución entre humanos y contextos, el segundo lo hace en su atención a objetos, todo lo que una persona nota (incluyendo en principio inobservables). El significado de los objetos se expresa en términos de acción y dependen de hábitos, que son predisposiciones para acciones y, por tanto, son más íntimos e informativos que las elecciones. Así, se abarca más que la acción reflexiva. Explicar al *transagente* pragmático requiere el estudio de objetivos y hábitos, lo que implica la inclusión de significados e interpretación.

Consecuentemente, se encuentra que el agente razonante del EC puede beneficiarse de la inclusión de en principio inobservables mediante los objetos y hábitos pragmáticos, ampliar los elementos que constituyen a los individuos con los mismos elementos, darle sentido a la naturaleza y función de valores y preferencias, y enriquecer su explicación de

la relación entre individuos y su contexto mediante la transacción pragmática. Por tanto, el transagente pragmático puede incluir grupos abandonados por el EC. Adicionalmente, el pragmatismo puede complementar al EC en otros aspectos. Sobre la ontología, mientras el EC se ha abstenido de tratar temas ontológicos, el pragmatismo se adhiere a una filosofía de las ciencias analiticista, que parece coincidir con el agente razonante del EC y sus elementos constitutivos: elección (observables) y razonamiento (inobservables). Con respecto a asuntos empíricos, el EC ha basado su flexibilidad en un entendimiento inexperto del pragmatismo, ya que parece mantener rastros positivistas. Suscribirse a su filosofía puede resultar beneficioso.

A propósito de la libertad, la filosofía naturalista del pragmatismo puede ayudar a aliviar la atención del EC a la elección y abordar la continuidad del comportamiento, abarcando acción no reflexiva y reflexiva, que parece ser el énfasis del EC. Sobre la democracia, el pragmatismo amplía la red más allá que el EC al aplicar la democracia a todos los niveles de asociación humana, no solo la sociedad y el estado, que parece ser el interés del EC. Finalmente, acerca de la normatividad, aunque ambos son consecuencialistas, mientras el EC propone las capacidad y funcionamientos como fines, el pragmatismo promueve la acción. Estas no son posiciones incompatibles. En la medida en que el EC pueda avanzar la acción, un enfoque de capacidad pragmático puede alojar considerar al desarrollo como libertad.

Resum

L'Enfocament de Capacitat (EC) d'Amartya Sen fa una important contribucio a la lliteratura del desenroll. Se mou de l'enfocament convencional en un unic indicador: opulencia, a un emfatis en la gent, la seua pluralitat, i les multiples dimensions que caracterisen la seua calitat de vida. Aixina, propon una explicacio dels sers humans i la seua agencia. Sense perjuï de les seues ventages, la seua nocio d'agencia sembla mereixer estudi a fondaria.

Esta dissertacio explora l'alcanç real de l'agencia de l'EC aixina com les seues llimitacions, i sugerix una forma de complementar-la. Una elaboracio de l'agent capacitat albarca dos elements: llibertat o eleccio i racionalitat o raonament. Aixina, l'EC rebuja a l'agent racional convencional i promou un *raonant*. Per tant, l'agencia de l'EC sembla requerir atencio a la medicio i explicacio (observables) aixina com al significat i interpretacio (inobservables), lo que demanda moure's mes alla d'una filosofia de la ciencia positivista. Al mateix temps, se troba que esta nocio sembla deixar gent que te a atres triant i raonant per ells sense explicacio.

Per a brindar un complement a l'EC en abdos aspectes, se propon el pragmatisme de John Dewey. Es una filosofia en una proposta de com la gent pensa i actua. L'elaboracio de l'agencia pragmatica se fa des de l'ontologia filosofica. El pragmatisme s'ubica com una filosofia de la ciencia analiticist puix adopta el monisme ment-mon i el fenomenalisme. Mentres el primer s'evidencia en el seu concepte de transaccio, sugerint una mutua constitucio entre humans i contexts, el segon ho fa en la seua atencio a objectes, tot lo que una persona nota (incloent en principi inobservables). El significat dels objectes s'expressa en termens d'accio i depenen d'habits, que son predisposicions per a accions i, per tant, son mes intims i informatius que les eleccions. Aixina, se compren mes que l'accio reflexiva. Explicar al *transagent* pragmatic requerix l'estudi d'objectius i habits, lo que implica l'inclusio de significats i interpretacio.

Conseqüentment, se troba que l'agent raonant de l'EC pot beneficiar-se de l'inclusio d'en principi inobservables mediant els objectes i habits pragmatics, ampliar els elements que constituixen als individus en els mateixos elements, donar-li sentit a la naturalea i funcio de valors i preferencies, i enriquir la seua explicacio de la relacio entre individus i el seu context mediant la transaccio pragmatica. Per tant, el transagent pragmatic pot incloure

grups abandonats per l'EC. Adicionalment, el pragmatisme pot complementar a l'EC en atres aspectes. Sobre l'ontologia, mentres l'EC s'ha abstingut de tractar temes ontologics, el pragmatisme s'adherix a una filosofia de les ciencies analiticist, que sembla coincidir en l'agent raonant de l'EC i els seus elements constitutius: eleccio (observables) i raonament (inobservables). En respecte a assunts empirics, l'EC ha basat la seua flexibilitat en un enteniment inexpert del pragmatisme, ya que sembla mantindre rastres positivistes. Subscriure's a la seua filosofia pot resultar beneficios.

A proposit de la llibertat, la filosofia naturalista del pragmatisme pot ajudar a aliviar l'atencio de l'EC a l'eleccio i abordar la continuïtat del comportament, comprenent accio no reflexiva i reflexiva, que sembla ser el emfatis de l'EC. Sobre la democracia, el pragmatisme amplia la xarcia mes alla que l'EC a l'aplicar la democracia a tots els nivells d'associacio humana, no nomes la societat i l'estat, que sembla ser l'interes de l'EC. Finalment, al voltant de la normativitat, encara que abdos son conseqüèncialistes, mentres l'EC propon les capacitat i funcionaments com fins, el pragmatisme promou l'accio. Estes no son posicions incompatibles. En la mesura en que l'EC puga alvançar l'accio, un enfocament de capacitat pragmatica pot estajar considerar al desenroll com llibertat.

Preface
How to think about and act towards development

How to think about and act towards development? These were the questions guiding this PhD dissertation at a personal level, and reflect the culmination of a life-long pursuit. Born and raised in Ecuador, a country with embarrassing levels of inequality and poverty, I became interested in such issues at a rather early age. Belonging to the middle class, I quickly recognized my privileges in this context and assumed them as a responsibility and duty to work to expand them to those who did not have them.

I sought to gain the tools to address these issues in different ways throughout my education. While during my undergrad I received a basic instruction, it was my experience abroad that consolidated my personal project. Having been fortunate enough to study graduate programs in Germany and the United Kingdom, I became acquainted with a wide array of topics, with an emphasis on the themes of my interest. Along the way, I was exposed to different disciplines, traditions and schools, and become increasingly comfortable with inter- and multi-disciplinarity as well as confident in the benefits of that approach. My understanding of the issues with which development is concerned has been greatly informed by this diverse training. In fact, this dissertation is an illustration of the confidence placed on its potential.

While completing these studies, I independently became interested in development policy. Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom* was the culprit. Autodidactically, I learnt as much as I could about his work and related literature regarding poverty and inequality. Sen's style and content proved to persuasive in tackling the issues that concerned my growing up. Contributing to that project, then, became one of my main objective and decided to eventually pursue doctoral studies in this field.

Thinking about development

Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (CA) paved the way for me to understand deprivation. A subject mainly discussed in the field of economics, his philosophical and economic approach facilitated the access to the literature for a layperson. His proposal to move from the means (opulence) to the ends (people) of development resonated deeply with my convictions and intuitions.

The main themes developed by the CA caught my attention but none more so than agency. My curiosity regarding deprivation often led to issues regarding how people deal with such situation and how people can be helped to overcome them. Human conduct, as a result, has been a central concern of mine. Sen referred to his approach as "agency-oriented" and, as such, it motivated me to delve deeper into that aspect.

As I engaged with his work, and that of his followers, I found many answers and raised a few questions. Because of the CA's roots in economics, the literature has mostly focused on empirical issues. Therefore, these efforts have sought to make the approach fit into their preferred methods, i.e. quantitative, following a (neo/post) positivist philosophy of science. This drew my attention because my incipient reading of the CA led me to a different conclusion. Hence, two questions emerged rather prominently: i) has agency within the approach been thoroughly fleshed out? and, ii) which philosophy of science can better support that notion of agency?

These are deeply intertwined issues with intrinsic and instrumental value. Intrinsically, shedding light on them could add to the efforts enriching the approach conceptually. Instrumentally, such undertaking could contribute to the conduct empirical applications of the approach.

In order to answer the first question, I focused on Sen's wider work, beyond the CA. It led me to the prominence of reasoning for agency in his contributions, which I have sought to elaborate on in one of the chapters in this dissertation, pointing to its implications for development research and practice. This review also hinted to Sen's position (or lack thereof) regarding the philosophy of science. In order to answer the second question, however, I had to look elsewhere.

Acting towards development

Pragmatism, specifically classical pragmatism, was presented to me during my first graduate studies and has stuck with me ever since. Although rather difficult to digest, it felt promising at the time and proved useful later on. The practice-oriented nature of development studies in general and the CA in particular resonated largely with pragmatism's focus on action and its concern with addressing actual social problems,

despite being a philosophy. This intuition guided me in the search for an answer to the second question.

Pragmatism offers an alternative to the dominant tradition in the CA's empirical literature. Not only that, it constitutes an alternative to positivist orthodoxy and also the interpretivist heterodoxy in the study of development more widely. As such, it neither subscribes to the exclusive use of certain techniques (quantitative or qualitative, respectively), nor to their assumptions. It, nonetheless, welcomes both or either, whenever warranted. Thus, it seems better equipped to complement the CA's agency abstractly, providing it with the philosophical (ontological) foundations that can better support it and, by so doing, better guide the conduct of empirical inquiry. Indeed, this very aspect has been pointed out as one in which the CA requires further work.

Certainly, because of this interwovenness, pragmatism as a philosophy of science also had something to say about agency. Elaborating that argument proved to be a rather demanding endeavor since classical pragmatists did not addressed this issue directly. A chapter of this dissertation is dedicated to discuss that subject, identify the main characteristics of the pragmatic agent, and suggests the implications for development research and practice. By so doing, this discussion hints the agreements as well as the disagreements that can be found between pragmatism and the CA.

There is much that pragmatism and the CA can learn from each other. While these literatures have much in common, there are also important differences. In this sense, the possibility for complementarity is great and the benefits of such undertaking even more so. From theory to praxis, the contributions of classical pragmatism could plausibly address some issues still within the CA, beyond agency.

Consequently, the combination of the CA with pragmatism seems like a promising marriage, which is most assuredly not exhausted in the following pages. It is, nevertheless, a necessary start in that direction and a plausible answer to the questions regarding 'how to think about and act towards development'.

Introduction
Development and Agency

Development is a value-laden concept. It not only refers to the idea of change descriptively, but attaches value to it; that is, it does so normatively. Much like other notions such as liberty and peace, development conveys a positive valuation (in contrast to others like slavery and war, which convey a negative one). Thus, development denotes the idea of positive change (Chambers 2004). As such, ideas about development matter because they indicate what ought to be changed, in which direction, and even how that change should ensue. Put simply, they suggest the end as well as the means.

The concept of development has had several definitions and been given various treatments, which have been related to human well-being, to a lesser or greater degree (Sen 1988). That is, within the debate about development, there is an underlying discussion about human beings. Different approaches and frameworks entail different foci about what matters but also different and important assumptions, many of them concerning people and their agency. If the latter do not obtain, the approach could be suspect. This is significant because studying 'development' usually goes beyond an intellectual exercise and seeks to have practical consequences, which means that it affects (and seeks to do so) people's lives. Thus, ideas about development matter not only because they affect human beings, but also because they entail ideas about them.

Discussing development ideas is significant because they influence scholars and practitioners. International agencies inspire their work on them, finance and investment opportunities depend on them, government policy decisions and interventions are implemented based on them. Until the turn of the century, the dominant approach was Gross National Product (GNP) per capita, or growth (Alkire 2010; Spence 2010; Dowrick 2007). A pertinent example is provided by the annual World Development Reports, issued by the World Bank. Until 1998, this organization included a ranking of all countries ordered in terms of their performance on one indicator, which equated development to that indicator. That instrument is not a merely descriptive document but a normative one as well. It signals what matters, where countries ought to focus their efforts in order to show a better performance, a higher development, whether in terms of other countries or in terms of themselves in previous years.

Supporting this perspective is the assumption that increases in growth mean increases in income and a higher income leads to higher consumption, which leads to better well-being. This focus on a single indicator dominated the discussion of development in the second half of the twentieth century, even distinguishing developed from under-developed countries. However, what at first sight may have made sense, it came to be questioned when given a closer look. Increases in GNP per capita were shown to be compatible with alarming levels of destitution (Ranis, Stewart and Ramirez, 2000; Clower *et al.*, 1966). That is, development as growth did not translate into people's lives.

Against this backdrop, Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (CA) has provided an alternative idea of development. Since its conception, more than thirty years ago, it engaged in the ambitious project of reconsidering what development is. Challenging the dominant focus on opulence or command over resources, it privileges people and their quality of life. For the CA, people are what matters for development and redefines it as freedom, emphasizing that it entails the enlargement of people's choices. Consequently, Sen's project entails advancing an account of what human beings are.

In that undertaking, the CA highlights multidimensionality and human plurality. Regarding multidimensionality, the approach focuses on what people actually do and are as well as what they can do and be. In this sense, functionings and capabilities are proposed. While the former refers to an individual's attained 'doings' and 'beings' that they value and have reason to value, denoting achievement, the latter encompasses all possible functionings from which an individual can choose, conveying freedom. Whether one or the other, the focus is on combinations of doings and beings, which are constitutive of a person's being (Sen 1990), and make up types of life (Sen 1993). By so doing it expands the informational base, beyond a single dimension or indicator, to all the dimensions that make life worthwhile.

Additionally, the capability perspective acknowledges that individuals have a wide array of motivations. The notion of agency denotes the totality of a person's goals, encompassing self-regarding and other regarding ones, and the concept of well-being designates solely self-regarding ones. Both functionings and capabilities can be manifested in terms of agency or well-being. That there are multiple legitimate goals is also referred to as inter-end variation (Sen 1992).

Concerning human plurality, the CA recognizes that converting resources into functionings and capabilities is not automatic but mediated. Different people in different social and environmental contexts may require different amounts and types of resources to reach analogous levels of well-being. These mediating factors are personal or internal characteristics as well as contextual or external features, also referred to as conversion factors. This emphasis on diversity is also known as inter-individual variation (Sen 1992).

What is more, in fleshing out his argument about human beings, Sen further elaborates the idea of agency "[…] in its older – and 'grander' – sense as someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well". As such, two elements are underscored: i) acting and bringing about change or freedom and choice; and, ii) judging those actions and changes as well as their underlying values and preferences or rationality and reasoning. Because of this, the CA encourages regarding people as in charge of their destinies, rather than simply as recipients of policy. The CA, accordingly, favors public participation, even for the selection and valuation of relevant dimensions (for capabilities or functionings), and is inherently democratic (Sen 2004; 1999). This notion of agency, thus, has been found to have intrinsic, instrumental and constructive value (Alkire 2009). Such treatment of human beings seems to be normatively appropriate and empirically sound.

Normatively, regarding humans as subjects with legitimate desires and different degrees of power to fulfill them is ethical because it neither underestimates them nor patronizes them. That approach goes some way in equalizing the destitute with the well-off and by so doing, it humanizes them. Empirically, the evidence suggests that this is, in fact, the case; people have different preferences and have, to different extents, the potential to act in order to pursue them. Both, preferences and actions, can be shaped by adequate policies, but to be adequate, the latter first have to acknowledge humans as having both. Therefore, treating people as agents can hardly be overstated. Hence, Sen (1999) has referred to the CA as freedom-centered and agency-oriented.

The CA has proven to be quite influential for development in academic as well as policy circles. Although conceived within economics and philosophy, its ability to engage different disciplines in constructive dialogue, manifested in the growing body of work discussing it, speaks volumes of its reach (Robeyns 2017). Similarly, the increasingly

important Human Development Reports, issued by the United Nations Development Program, which build on the capability perspective's insights, ranking countries according to their performance on multiple dimensions of life with intrinsic value (e.g. education, health and standard of living), attest to the persuasiveness of its argument.

At the same time, the CA has been subjected to rigorous examination. Due to its practical nature, on the face of the challenges that its operationalization poses, loud voices have questioned its applicability (see e.g. Sugden 1993, Srinivasan 1994). Conceptually, it has also been criticized on several accounts. Perhaps one of the most relevant critiques has been the emergence of the *capabilities* approach (emphasis on the plural) which addresses the absence of a list of proposed capabilities in Sen's work (Nussbaum 2006; 2011). Additionally, and most notably, concerning the CA's account of human beings, it has been suggested that despite its contributions, it regards people mainly as choosers (Gasper 2002), remaining unspecified in sociological terms (Gangas 2016; Zimmermann 2006).

While these arguments hold much merit, they also seem to focus mostly on the first part of the older and grander notion adopted by the CA. To be sure, the approach appears to privilege it over the second. The primacy of *freedom*, evidenced in the proposition of regarding development as the 'enlargement of people's *choices'*, is testament to this. Presumably, this is partly due to the primacy of observables and objectivity in the field of economics, where much of the debate has taken place. The second part of agency's notion can be discerned from the attention to *rationality*. This can be illustrated by the CA's defining capabilities as all possible doings and beings that people value and have *reason* to value. This, in turn, brings in-principle unobservables to the fore. However, this emphasis has certainly not been fully consistent in Sen's work, let alone in the wider literature.

This literature prompts questions regarding the actual scope of the CA's notion of agency and how to complement it. This is a twofold undertaking. On the one hand, it seems warranted to scrutinize Sen's notion of agency, incorporating acting (choice) as well as judging (reasoning) as a whole, to delineate its breadth and depth. On the other hand, recognizing the value in Sen's proposal, the task entails building on it so as to aid in the realization of its project. This means that, despite the attributes and benefits of important traditions in the debate regarding human action, some can be deemed more pertinent than others. In fact, some might be rather inconsistent with the approach and, while addressing

some relevant issues, may run the risk of casting shadow rather than shedding light on the framework.

Apropos of the CA's notion of agency, the component related to rationality seems to require exploration and elaboration. Sen's wider work suggests a rejection of the axioms advanced by rational choice theory as he sees them rendering humans 'rational fools' (Sen 1977). Further, Sen (2002, p. 4) considers rationality as "subjecting one's choices —of actions as well as of objectives, values and priorities— to reasoned scrutiny". This idea is complemented later when Sen (2009, p. 180, emphasis in the original) specifies: "[...] rationality is primarily a matter of basing —explicitly or by implication— our choices on reasoning that we can reflectively *sustain,* and it demands that our choices, as well as our actions and objectives, values and priorities, can survive our own seriously undertaken critical scrutiny." This indicates the importance of the study of preferences, values, and reasons, i.e. meanings and interpretation. In fact, the possibility of scrutinizing reasons for reasons, or preferences for preferences (second order reasons, second order preferences) is stressed (Sen 2002). In this sense, from this perspective, agency's rationality is not only a fundamental part but arguably better regarded as *reasoning*.

The inclusion of meaning and interpretation in the treatment of agency implies a movement away from an exclusive focus on observables, i.e. choice. This begs the question regarding the capabilitarian agent in ontological terms. Sen, however, has remained notoriously silent regarding issues pertaining the philosophy of science. As a result, ontology has been pointed out as one area where the CA requires further elaboration (Robeyns 2008). While it is clear that the inclusion of perception and hermeneutics (alongside measurement and explanation) in the study of agency suggests a move away from positivism, it is less clear in which direction.

This is of the utmost importance since public policy entails assumptions regarding humans and how to account for their conduct (Le Grand 2003). People and their quality of life is at stake. Not only can these assumptions make or break policies inspired by them but be beneficial or detrimental to the people they target. This is particularly so in the field of development as practice-oriented, whose insights affect people one way or another, and even more so in the case of the CA, who has placed people at the locus of attention.

Moreover, not only has the CA's notion of agency been unspecified in terms of its rationality component, but also it has also been treated as stable, stressing its latest definition. In fact, the lack of specificity can be explained in terms of that focus. Ideas regarding the capabilitarian agent have suffered changes throughout Sen's work. Perhaps the most relevant, as it also pertains freedom, is the differentiation regarding instrumental and realized agency success, and its abandonment.

Until 1992, Sen argued against the association of freedom with direct control on agency-related grounds. 'Freedom as control' was rejected because of its exclusive focus on people having the levers or power for the capabilities they enjoy, arguing that "[m]any freedoms take the form of our ability to get what we value and want, without the levers of control being *directly* operated by us" (Sen 1992, p. 64). Thus, he proposed a distinction between 'realized agency success' and 'instrumental agency success'. While the latter was concerned with those outcomes brought about by the agents themselves and, as such, conveyed the idea of freedom as control, the former was broader and encompassed all outcomes, whether the agent was instrumental in achieving them or not (Sen 1992).

The relevant literature has not elaborated this issue in depth. However, it is rather significant. This differentiation had the advantage of accounting for the agency of people who have others choosing and reasoning for them. Children, the elderly, or people with mental disabilities are notorious examples. Their outcomes could arguably be captured by realized agency success. Nonetheless, this distinction has been dropped thereafter, suggesting that the approach no longer rejects the notion of freedom as control and leaving these capability-relevant groups unaccounted for.

In Sen's later and wider work, this issue appears to be left unattended. Personal or internal conversion factors would not encompass these agents since they seem to apply to individuals *qua* choosers, even if their choices are not optimal. To reiterate, the aforementioned groups have others making choices and reasons for them. In fact, the CA's adherence to the 'older and grander' notion of agency, as someone bringing about change and whose choices can be judged in terms of their own reasons or those of others, seems to corroborate this void.

As for a complementary framework, there are multiple theories of action and human agency from which to choose. To make sense of this, it seems warranted to take a step as

far back as possible so as to identify the broadest alternatives. Realizing that accounting for human beings is an ontological matter, the point of departure is the philosophy of social science. The outset, however is not ontology, as in the conventional ontology-epistemology-methods (Sumner and Tribe 2008) scheme since it subordinates epistemology and methods to ontology (Jackson 2011). In this scheme, ontology consists on an inventory of things that exist and, thus, can be regarded as *scientific* (Bhaskar 1975). Instead, in seeking to start from the most basic position possible, philosophical ontology, dealing with our hook-up with the world and, as such, logically prior to the scientific one, is deemed more pertinent.

Such a heuristic is provided by Jackson (2011), employing two continua capturing the relationship between mind and the world, and that between the knower and the known. This device is elaborated in detail further on in this dissertation, to flesh out the pragmatic agent so for current purposes a brief account should suffice. From the combination of their extreme positions, four philosophies of science are identified: neopositivism, reflexivity, critical realism, and analyticism, which are regarded as ideal types in the Weberian sense (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Jackson's (2011) matrix of philosophically ontological wagers and the philosophies of science resulting from their combination

		Relationship between knowledge and observation	
		Phenomenalism	Transfactualism
Relationship between the knower and the known	Mind-world dualism	Neopositivism	Critical Realism
	Mind-world monism	Analyticism	Reflexivity

Source: Jackson (2011)
Elaboration: author

At the intersection of mind-world dualism and phenomenalism the most widely used approach is located, namely *neopositivism* (also referred to simply as positivism in this dissertation). The division between the mind and the world implies that 'there is a world out there' independent of the mind, i.e. an objective world. Moreover, this world can be known as it is. This means that objective knowledge, or the 'truth' in an absolute sense, is possible. The interest, thus, is on observables (phenomenalism) and on uncovering the laws that govern the world. Therefore, causal explanation is privileged by this philosophy of social science. This position is mainly illustrated by conventional economics. On the opposite extreme, at the junction of mind-world monism and transfactualism is *reflexivity*. Adhering to mind-world monism, it assumes that the world and the mind are constitutive of each other. Further, the world is necessarily approached and known by a mind so there is no unbiased position from which to assess claims about it. Being part of the world, people access it by their practices so they can only know the latter, making personal biases relevant. Thus, this philosophy of science entails introspection regarding the effects that those practices (knowledge generation included) have on the world. This transcending of facts denotes its transfactualism. Hence, the focus is on in-principle unobservables and on understanding and interpretation. Postmodern and poststructuralist traditions epitomize this position. Combining mind-world dualism with transfactualism is *critical realism*. The separation of the mind and the world prompts an interest in knowing the world as it is, leading to a concern with its essence. In order to find it, it moves beyond experience and observables and assumes the existence of a multilayered structure and mechanisms constituting social reality, some elements of which can and other cannot be perceived (transfactualism), analytically differentiated by the real, the actual, and the empirical. As such, both observables and in-principle unobservables are admitted. The critical realist literature exemplifies this position. Finally, merging mind-world monism and phenomenalism is a*nalyticism*. Since it subscribes to mind-world monism, it assumes that people and the world are mutually constitutive of each other. The world is necessarily known by a mind and through people's practices. Thus, there is no objective position, bringing personal biases to the fore. At the same time, it privileges experience (phenomenalism) but in light of its monism it admits in-principle unobservables as well, without commitments regarding their existence. As it is argued in this dissertation, classical pragmatism is an instance of this position.

Based on this heuristic, the agencies advanced by each of these philosophies of social science were fleshed out, also conceived as ideal types (see Figure 2). The result of this

exercise indicates that neopositivism advances the conventional agent following the axioms proposed by rational choice theory, who is unaffected by the structure, i.e. the virtually omnipotent *homo economicus*. Accounting for this agent's behavior requires observation and objectivity, therefore, the focus is on choice. Reflexity, being diametrically opposed to the latter, furthers the primacy of structure over agency, focusing on language as wholly determining the universe of possibilities for human beings, rendering them nearly impotent patients. Hence, accounting for them demands particular attention to meanings and interpretation, i.e. unobservables. Critical realism proposes an agent that engages with the structure in cycles, where each one exerts change on the other as in taking turns, signaling thusly an interaction between them and turning humans into interagents. Their behavior can be studied in terms of both meanings (unobservables) and choices (observables). Finally, analyticism considers humans and their context as one unit, constantly changing each other and mutually constituting one another, ruled by permanent and simultaneous exchange, perhaps best denoted by the term transaction, which makes humans transagents. Thus, the latter can be also be accounted for in terms of observables and unobservables.

Figure 2. Four agencies resulting from the combination of philosophically ontological wagers

		Relationship between knowledge and observation	
		Phenomenalism	Transfactualism
Relationship between the knower and the known	Mind-world dualism	(Rational) Agent	Interagent
	Mind-world monism	Transagent	Patient

Source: Garcés (forthcoming)
Elaboration: author

This argument was elaborated elsewhere (see Garcés forthcoming). While exploring the themes pertaining this dissertation, the aforementioned analysis was fully developed in

the manuscript titled *Mapping human agency: agents, patients, interagents, and transagents*, not included in this work and currently under peer review at a relevant international scientific journal. Since that argument moved well beyond the field of 'development', the area of interest of this dissertation, and the three essential chapters for the argument (and necessary for the compendium format) are already comprised in the following pages, its inclusion is not deemed crucial for the line of reasoning presented. Indeed, to maintain a streamlined argumentation, addressing the issue in this introduction should suffice.

The identification of these four agencies already reduces the complexity of the undertaking. To narrow down the option to one, a process of elimination was carried out. The two components of the CA's notion of agency, which have to be encompassed without neither being reduced to the other, establish the criteria for discrimination: freedom or choice (observables) and rationality or reasoning (unobservables). The relevance given to reasoning by the CA, suggests a move away from neopositivism. At the same time, the significance of choice for the approach indicates a distancing from reflexivity. Critical realism offers an alternative that admits both, positing the generation of layered structure consisting of existing real, actual and empirical mechanisms. As such, this perspective requires assuming that in-principle unobservables exist. However, Sen has been rather silent regarding the bases undergirding the CA in terms of the philosophy of science. At the very least, that means that he has made no explicit ontological commitments, which is exactly what critical realism demands. Therefore, adopting it would ascribe a position to the CA. The silence regarding this matter would offer little solace for such imputation, particularly if there is a less imposing option. The last alternative is analyticism, which also allows encompassing choice and reasoning. Importantly, however, it does so with much more flexibility, without ontological commitments regarding the existence of in-principle unobservables. Hence, the analyticist philosophy of science is found to be pertinent.

Since analyticism is still an ideal type, it is necessary to choose a framework that falls within it. In this sense, Jackson's (2009) incipient suggestion that pragmatism may share analyticist philosophical wagers hints to a plausible specific framework. Exploring pragmatism, moreover, seems particularly advisable given the influence that Hilary Putnam (arguably one of the main pragmatists in the 21st century) and Amartya Sen had on each other's work (see admissions of this in Putnam 2002).

Pragmatism, nonetheless, is not a monolith. At least two broad strands can be distinguished, namely classical pragmatism and neopragmatism (Misak 2007, Pihlström 2013, Hildebrand 2003, Menand 1997). Whereas the latter focuses on discourse, influenced by the linguistic turn (Bacon 2012; Bernstein 1983) and, therefore, leans towards a reflectivist philosophy of social science, the former privileges experience (Bacon 2012), securing its place within analyticism. That being so, classical pragmatism is deemed as the adequate framework for this undertaking.

Pragmatism in general, including its classical strand, has been rather difficult to define. Among some influential takes are: a theory of meaning and a theory of knowledge (Quinton 2010), an account of how we think (Menand 1997), or as Putnam (2009, p. 188) puts it "[a]ccording to James, pragmatism is a philosophy; it is a method for settling metaphysical disputes; it is an attitude; and it is a theory of truth". What is clear from this, however, is that it defies the lay understanding of pragmatism as concerned with mere outcomes and 'whatever works'.

The departure point of classical pragmatism is acting (Kratochwil 2011) or action. It rejects the exclusive attention given to 'things', as in empiricism, or the 'mind' as in rationalism (Dewey 1917). For this perspective, action pervades existence and it is not only its point of departure but also its ultimate concern. Indeed, even the meaning of objects is defined in terms of the actions they entail. This is reflected by the pragmatic maxim:

> To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve – what sensation we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, whether immediate or remote, is then for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all (James 1904, pp. 673-674).

Dewey (1910; 1931), influenced by Charles Darwin's work, objected to the focus on absolutes and certainty, proposing instead a philosophy of continuity, progress and change. Accordingly, human beings are not afforded any privileged position vis-à-vis nature. As any other organism, humans are regarded as part of a continuity with the world. Thus, they do not consist of two fundamentally different substances, one being the body (material) and the other being the mind (immaterial). A person, conversely, is one body-

mind organism (Dewey 1958). In fact, abandoning mind-world dualism, the dominant positivist assumption, Dewey advanced the concepts of 'organism' and 'environment', to underscore that neither has metaphysical primacy over the other and that both give meaning to one another.

In this sense, organisms (humans) and environment (context) are deeply interwoven. They are constantly and simultaneously acting towards the other and being acted upon. That is, they are constitutive of each other. As such, humans constitute the environment and are constituted by it. Their environment, importantly, consists of the totality of elements making it up *inter alia*: physical, social, cultural, emotional, intellectual factors. Moreover, in this process of mutual change, humans are purposively attempting to induce the shape that change will take. As a result, individuals are emergent, not static. They are continuously and constantly being made up by their circumstances.

For classical pragmatism, this relationship between organism and their environment is regarded as action. What is more, from this perspective, it is a 'transaction'. Dewey (and Bentley [1949]) rejected the conventional notions of self-action and inter-action, which conveyed, respectively, that things acted by their own powers, and that one thing is balanced against another thing as in causal relations. Instead, transaction, denotes "[…] that systems deal with aspects and phases of action without any attribution to elements or entities supposedly detachable from the system that includes them" (Smith 2004, p. 137). Hence, the organism-environment (human-context) transaction is regarded as one indivisible unit.

At the heart of human action is habit. Dewey (1930, p. 125) states that "[m]an is a creature of habit, not of reason nor yet of instinct." Habit, however, is more than mindless acts. It is regarded as "a predisposition formed by a number of specific acts [and thus] an immensely more intimate and fundamental part of ourselves than are vague, general, conscious choices" (Dewey 1930, p. 25). Habits evidence the most internalized meanings humans have of the objects that make up their world, i.e. interpretations of which a person is likely not to be fully aware. In this sense, habits make the world intelligible. As Dewey (1930, p. 67) stated "thought which does not exist within ordinary habits lacks means of execution". They make reflection possible and are logically prior to it, establishing its resources as well as mechanisms, and, by so doing, make sense of any reflective action, or choice. As such, pragmatism's focus on habit moves beyond privileging the study of

choices (and observables more broadly), albeit it includes the latter as well.

Furthermore, individual habits and customs are derived from social habits and customs. Individuals learn actions and habits by imitation and role playing (Blumer 2004), by watching others transact with objects. This is particularly evident in the case of children, who learn language, norms, and customs in this way. For classical pragmatism, humans are organisms of habit, "[…] not just persons in general with minds in general. They are beings with habits, and beings who upon the whole esteem the habits they have, if for no other reason than that, having them, their imagination is thereby limited. The nature of habit is to be assertive, insistent, self-perpetuating" (Dewey 1930, p. 58).

As the above suggests, and the pragmatic maxim illustrates, objects also take central stage for pragmatism. They are regarded as everything and anything of which an individual is aware. They can be material or immaterial, real or fictional, etc. If a person notices it, it is an object for them. As such, they constitute a person's world. Additionally, their meaning is manifested in terms of the actions they entail. Importantly, this enables regarding the self and habits as objects towards which one can exert actions. Further, objects point to the inclusion of in-principle unobservables alongside observables in the account of agency, without any ontological commitment to them.

Thus, in the continuity of behavior, this philosophy encompasses all types of (trans)actions. From "primitive reflexes, to habits, to reflective intelligence" (Baldwin 1988, p. 39), classical pragmatism seems to provide a rich explanation of the diversity of human experience. Hence, its attention to habits could arguably contribute to accounting for the behavior of those groups who have others choosing and reasoning for them, and who have been left unaccounted for by the CA. Finally, this exposition of the pragmatic agent, who is interwoven with their world made out of objects, exposes its admission of both observables and in-principle unobservables, which signals a plausible foundation for the elusive discussion regarding the philosophy of social science and the CA.

Consequently, the question guiding this dissertation can be stated thusly: *'can classical pragmatism contribute to enrich the CA's concept of agency?'* If ideas about development matter, ideas about human agency matter just as much. Since much development policy entails assumptions about people, whether as ends or as means, should the latter not obtain, its effectiveness can be jeopardized. At best, in those situations, policies may well

hit the target but miss the point, at worst they can be detrimental to their very goals. This is not only due to the fact that the opportunity cost of public policy is other public policy, but because ill-informed policy itself can be harmful. As Sen has stressed (1999, p. 209) "a misconceived theory can kill".

To elaborate an answer for that question, conventional discourse hermeneutics, as customary in philosophy, is employed as a research strategy. The wider work of Amartya Sen, extending beyond that strictly related to the CA, is explored to flesh out the actual scope and limitations of his notion of agency and the capabilitarian agent. Similarly, the work of classical pragmatists, particularly that of John Dewey, is analyzed to identify the main features of the pragmatic agent. That is, as it should, the study focuses on the analysis of primary literature, with reliance on secondary literature when such complementary is deemed required. The aim is to elaborate the respective notions of agency as derived directly from the aforementioned authors within the relevant literatures. In both bodies of work, as anticipated above, the discussion pays particular attention to philosophy of social science.

Additionally, since this dissertation deals with two literatures elaborated originally in English, the analysis is focused on the work written in this language. To be sure, the influence of the CA can be attested not only in its ability to transcend disciplinary frontiers, but also linguistic boundaries, and there is much valuable and promising work published in other languages. However, as it stands, English seems to be the *de facto* main international academic language. Moreover, in no other language is the debate concerning Sen's and Dewey's work as prolific as in English and it is expected that the most relevant contributions in other languages are likely to be found in this one. Thus, it seems warranted to focus on it in order to maximize the literature review. Certainly, there is a possibility of missing insights by the choice of language. But it seems inevitable since a choice in this regard ought to be made for practical reasons. Additionally, to reiterate, by focusing on works published in what is arguably the global academic *lingua franca*, towards which the most significant insights in other languages are reasonably expected to converge, this risk seems to be minimized.

About this dissertation

I have dedicated the following essays in order to explore capabilitarian and pragmatic agency. As a format I have chosen the compendium of published articles for two main reasons, namely, timeliness and quality. As it regards timeliness, the debate in the field of development is intense and constantly growing and the timing of publishing can be important for an article to be relevant. Therefore, submitting articles for publication as I completed them allowed me to share my ideas with a community of scholars and practitioners, and participate in that debate, as early as possible. The second reason is quality. By sending my manuscripts to relevant journals, I sought to get feedback from as many experts as possible and, thereby, enrich the arguments put forward. Interestingly, the comments were invariably positive and encouraging, which speaks volumes about the supervision I received. This was, nonetheless, a very useful exercise to learn how to speak a multidisciplinary audience, which characterizes the readership in development studies in general and that of the CA in particular, as well as to better understand the dynamics of publishing, and I am confident the essays have benefitted from it.

This dissertation is composed of six chapters and three parts, two chapters in each part. The first chapter is a state of the art of the relevant literature regarding the CA and the other five are original contributions developing the aforementioned ideas. Three of the latter are the final versions of the articles, accepted for publishing or published already. All have been accepted at the *Iberoamerican Journal of Development Studies*. This specialized and highly regarded journal was deemed pertinent, despite the fact that it only has two issues per year, making the process particularly demanding, because for three reasons: audience, extension and openness. Regarding the audience, this journal is specialized in development studies appealing to a rather wide audience, since it publishes work in Spanish as well as English. That is why the abstract of each article below is written in both languages. Apropos of the extension, adequately addressing these issues proved to be a task requiring meticulous elaboration. That means that each chapter demanded space beyond what analogous journals allowed. Finally, concerning openness, I have increasingly become a firm believer in open access in order to make these insights available to all who may be interested without a paywall or otherwise. I find that this is particularly important for development studies since research within this field seeks to be useful to address issues in places where paid journals can become prohibitedly expensive.

In this context, this dissertation endeavors to scrutinize the CA's notion of agency, explore its actual scope as well as limitations to identify its implications for development research and practice, and suggest a plausible way in which it can be enriched. Hence, the intuition guiding this project is twofold. On the one hand, contrary to some critiques, when analyzed within Sen's wider work, the CA's notion of agency has less in common with the convention and in fact challenges it fundamentally. On the other hand, the CA's agency could be enriched and philosophical classical pragmatism could prove to be a coherent complement, as they seem to have much in common.

Importantly, tackling human action entails a discussion about human beings, which touches upon ontological issues. Elaborating on the latter has implications for the conduct of inquiry as well as for the practice of development. Depending on the assumptions made about humans and their behavior, the insights and policies produced can prove more or less usable and effective, respectively. Therefore, by addressing the CA's agency, this project also suggests a plausible way to address an additional criticism raised by the literature, namely, the CA's ontological under-theorization. In this sense, this project adheres to what Sheppard (in Hardy 2016, p. 773), addressing another human-centered and practice-oriented discipline, states: "[i]nteresting as they may be, [philosophy of science] issues lack relevance or utility [...] unless they have practical utility, thus pushing [...] researchers to generate knowledge which is practically useful within 'the practice paradigm'."

For that undertaking, this dissertation is divided into three parts, each consisting of two chapters. Given that this dissertation takes the shape of the compendium of articles, the three middle chapters (2, 3 and 4) correspond to the final accepted for publishing or published versions in the *Iberoamerican Journal of Development Studies*. Chapters 1, 5, and 6 are currently under revision before being submitted to relevant scientific journals.

The first part is dedicated to the CA and elaborates a discussion of its contribution to the literature of development studies and public policy as well as an in-depth elaboration of its notion of agency. The first chapter, therefore, following Sen's argumentative style, presents the CA in contrast to the conventional approaches: utilitarianism and resourcism. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the CA in its own terms and establish

its scope and limitations. Therefore, it also presents the main critiques raised against it and the replies made to them. The main interest in this discussion are the critiques related to the notion of agency.

The CA's notion of agency is elaborated in the second chapter. Building on Sen's wider work, it establishes the importance of reason for agency. It argues that rationality is redefined as reasoning, which entails the critical scrutiny of choices but also of values and preferences. In fact, it can include the preferences for preferences. As such, contrary to conventional understandings and empirical applications of the approach, which suggest that it pays exclusive attention to choice, for the CA the *gustibus est disputandum*. Moreover, the importance of reasoning for Sen is such that its relation to agency seems to be close to agency's relation to freedom. Thus, it is argued that instead of a rational agent, the CA proposes a reasoning one. Consequently, the capabilitarian agent can be regarded as a multi-motivated, multidimensional, plural, reflective chooser. Its implications for development research and practice are argued from the philosophy of science and entail a challenge to positivist approaches concerned exclusively with observables (such as choice) and the necessary inclusion of interpretative traditions that allow factoring in meanings (such as [self] perceptions) alongside measurements.

The second part is devoted to pragmatism, mainly following the work of John Dewey, perhaps best regarded as classical pragmatism. Building on the previous discussion, which touches upon the philosophy of science, and emphasizing its policy relevancy, the third chapter discusses classical pragmatism philosophically and its implications for public policy. The argument tackles the push for evidence-based policy establishing a contrast between the conventional positivist approach and the pragmatic alternative. It argues that, contrary to the dominant tradition, for pragmatism, evidence does not speak for itself and that the theories, interests, and even imagination of whoever is generating it inevitably affects it. As such, pragmatism reconsiders what evidence is and how it is treated. Thus, pragmatic evidence-based policy recognizes that personal biases are as intrinsic as empirical evidence is to statements about reality and, further, that the former shapes the latter. The corollary of the discussion is a healthy awareness of the prejudiced positions of those generating and consuming evidence, which can lead to more effective policies.

Pragmatic agency is elaborated in the fourth chapter. The argument developed in the previous one is expanded in this chapter by dint of philosophical ontology. This entails

employing a heuristic that establishes two continua: the relationships between the knower and the known, and that between the observation and knowledge, at the extremes of which the following philosophical wagers are located, respectively: monism and dualism, and phenomenalism and transfactualism (Jackson 2011). The combination of these continua leads to the arguably most important philosophies of social science, conceived as ideal types: positivism, reflexivity, critical realism and analyticism.

It is argued that pragmatism adheres to analyticism, as it seems to subscribe to monism and phenomenalism. Monism denotes the philosophical wager that there is no mind-body separation or that the mind and the world are one and the same. Pragmatism shows this most evidently in its recognition that organism and environment constitute one indivisible unit constantly changing one another (Dewey 1958; 1985), i.e. they are engaged in transaction (Dewey and Bentley 1949). Phenomenalism, for analyticism, refers to the wager that only what can be experienced is knowable, with the possibility of knowing in-principle unobservables as long as there is no ontological commitment to their existence. This position is evidenced in pragmatism's attention to objects, which are anything and everything of which a person is aware, i.e. real or fictional, material or immaterial things, etc. (Blumer 2004). Hence, they are regarded as constitutive to a person's world. As such, they certainly include choice but, most importantly, they focus on habits as well as values and preferences. While values and preferences deserve particular attention since they reveal a person's being, habits are at the center of the analysis because they are predispositions for action and, thus, make sense of experience, they contribute to value formation, and are more intimate and informative than choice. As a result, pragmatism entails a move from action to transaction and from agency to transgency. In this sense, classical pragmatism suggests that human beings are transagents, which means that they are intelligent, reflective, diversely motivated organisms of habit that can be studied in terms of their objects.

The third part endeavors to take the argument developed in the previous two to its logical conclusion. It is composed of two chapters that discuss the agreements and disagreements between the CA and pragmatism in making the case for the benefits of a pragmatic capability approach. Chapter 5 addresses the main theme of this dissertation: agency, as well as two concomitant issues related to it namely ontology and empirical issues. Concerning agency, four issues are elaborated: objects and habits, the constitution of people, values and preferences, and the relation between agent and context. Since the CA's

reasoning agent seems to already admit the inclusion of in-principle unobservables, due to its attention to preferences, it is argued that the incorporation of pragmatic objects and habits could be the next step in that direction. Further, it is suggested that the inclusion of habits can contribute to account for non-reflective behavior, in addition to the reflective one entailed by choice, which is the focus of the CA. Likewise, it is posited that the inclusion of habits and objects could also enhance the elements constituting people, beyond achievements and personal characteristics. This can help to account for the agency of those groups who have others choosing and reasoning for them. Also, the discussion tackles how pragmatism could aid the CA to make better sense of the nature and function of values and preferences as well as how pragmatic transaction could enrich its account of the relation between people and their context.

With respect to ontology, although Sen has abstained from ontological issues, the CA seems to propose a social ontology and a rejection of ontological individualism. Moreover, the analysis suggests both traces of positivism and a call to move beyond it by the CA's reasoning agent. Pragmatism, in turn, is found to advance a more elaborate social ontology, which provides an account of collective action, and a rejection of ontological individualism. This is consistent with its adherence to an analyticist philosophy of science, which seems to concur with the CA's reasoning agent and, thus, could provide significant support for it.

As for empirical matters, the CA has shown flexibility appealing to the 'pragmatic nature of practical reason'. Nonetheless, this seems closer to a lay understanding of pragmatism than its actual philosophy. The latter takes the provisional character of knowledge seriously because of the intrinsic biases in its production and consumption, not just lack of information, which seems to be a positivist vestige remaining in the CA.

Chapter 6 deals with three additional central themes derived from the discussion regarding agency for both approaches: freedom, democracy and normativity, which warrant elaboration. Apropos of freedom, the CA and pragmatism agree on expanding its scope beyond choice (opportunity) and including context (process) as well as acknowledging an interdependence with reasoning and conversion factors. Despite the expansion, for the CA, choice seems to be equated to freedom (narrowly conceived), and the importance of rationality suggests a focus on sufficiently healthy and abled adults. Pragmatism, in turn, values choice but it does not equate it to freedom, which is regarded

as the power to transact, an attainment that enables people to change, to be and act differently. As such, it coincides with the CA and hints to a promising ground on which to build. Additionally, as in the case of agency, pragmatism's naturalism and its attention to the continuity in behavior seems to cast the net wider so as to encompass agents who have others choosing and reasoning for them.

Concerning democracy, both frameworks are committed to democracy because they regard people as agents, albeit different agents. The CA recognizes that there are different legitimate types of life that a person might lead, and that these may be affected by personal as well as contextual characteristics. Pragmatism sees individuals as intertwined with their environment, at all times changing it and being changed by it, and thus acting to control the form that such change should take based on their different experiences. Although the definitions provided by the approaches differ, they also regard democracy as means as well as an end. One of the most relevant divergences seems to be in the scope of application. The CA seems to focus on democracy as pertaining to the level of society, the nation or the state, omitting (tacitly) the exercise of democracy at lower levels or smaller units. Pragmatism, conversely, has a broader notion of democracy which explicitly applies to all modes of human association.

Finally, concerning normativity, coincidences and differences are also identified. Even though the two perspectives adhere to consequentialism, they focus on different ends. While the CA puts freedom and achievement at the evaluative space, pragmatism advances solely action. Nonetheless, it is argued that, to the extent that the former furthers the latter, a pragmatic capability approach can accommodate development as freedom. A brief pragmatic interpretation of development research and practice seems to support this take.

By exploring the possibility of combining these frameworks, the following essays start this research project and also this research program. There is much more to be said about this possibility. Many themes warranting attention have fallen outside the purview of this project but hopefully not outside that of the wider community of scholars and practitioners. This dissertation seeks to take only the first step *towards a pragmatic capability approach*.

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Part I
The Capability Approach and capabilitarian agency

What do you think of yourself? What do you think of the world? ...
These are questions with which all must deal as it seems good to them.

- Fitzjames Stephen

Chapter 1
Humanizing development: the Capability Approach[1]

1. Introduction

Development is not solely a descriptive concept but a normative one. It denotes change, but not any change. It conveys the idea of progress, advancement and betterment (Alkire & Deneulin, 2010a). As such, it denotes 'good change' (Chambers, 2004). Therefore, development ideas matter because they point out what matters. That is, they suggest what that change means, what ought to be changed and even how this change is to take place. Perhaps because of this feature, it falls under what the literature on political theory has called an 'essentially contested concept' (Freeden, 1996).

This means that there is no consensus on the meaning of the term. 'Development' has had several definitions and been given various treatments, which have been related to human well-being, to a lesser or greater degree (Sen 1988). However, different approaches and frameworks entail different foci about what matters but also different and important assumptions. If the latter do not obtain, the approach could be suspect. This realization becomes all the more relevant because studying 'development' usually goes beyond an intellectual exercise, it seeks to have practical consequences. That is, to a great extent, development is about applied instrumental research (Mehta *et al.*, 2006), which means that it affects (and seeks to do so) people's lives. After all, policy inspired by different approaches can well hit the target but miss the point[2].

> There are many fundamentally different ways of seeing the quality of living, and quite a few of them have some immediate plausibility. You could be *well off,* without being *well*. You could be *well,* without being able to lead the life you *wanted*. You could have got the life you *wanted,* without being *happy*. You could be *happy,* without having much *freedom*. You could have a good deal of *freedom,* without *achieving* much. We can go on. (Sen, 1988, p. 1)

[1] This chapter borrows heavily from my own work related to the CA, published in different journals while working on this dissertation (see Garcés 2020, Garcés 2019, 2018a, 2018b).

[2] Apropos, Alkire (2010, p. 191) states: "The policies, practices, analyses, and measures that guide development institutions can be scrutinized to uncover which truly aim at human freedoms, and how true their aim might be. Much of Sen's development writings engage or draw on investigations of this form. By such inspection, the oversights of development theories might be uncovered and corrected. Such work is terribly salient, for lives are at stake. In development, Sen observes, 'a misconceived theory can kill' (Sen 1999a: 209)".

The Capability Approach, henceforth the CA, has become the most influential framework providing a notion of development in the last three decades. The offspring of Amartya Sen, it is a people-centered approach that focuses on human beings and their quality of life. At its heart lie two questions: 'what are the lives that people are free to lead?' and 'what lives have they chosen to lead?'. By posing these questions, and in answering them, it has fundamentally challenged previously dominant approaches to development, providing an influential account of human beings and human agency.

If ideas about development matter, ideas about human agency matter just as much. Since much development policy entails assumptions about people, whether as ends or as means, should the latter not obtain, its effectiveness can be jeopardized. At best, in those situations, policies may well hit the target but miss the point, at worst they can be detrimental to their very goals. This is not only due to the fact that the opportunity cost of public policy is other public policy, but because ill-informed policy itself can be harmful. As Sen has stressed (1999, p. 209) "a misconceived theory can kill".

Against this backdrop, in order to present the CA, it seems warranted to briefly review some of the main approaches to development first. Sen himself has opted for this strategy in making the case for the CA, and this chapter follows suit.

Consequently, this chapter presents Sen's CA in the context of the broader debate regarding the meaning of development. The first section introduces the dominant approach to development during the twentieth century (and even nowadays in some quarters). Section two elaborates the underpinnings of that approach underlining the criticisms raised by Sen. In the third section, the CA is presented on its own terms, that is, avoiding a specific reading or interpretation from someone else (except of course the author's). On the basis of the previous discussion, section four highlights the scope and limitations of the approach. In the two previous sections, the issue of agency occupies a prominent place. The final section concludes.

2. Economistic development

The study of development has been dominated by economics. From the early and incipient initiatives in economics, development was understood in economic terms. So much so that

it is difficult to separate what is better understood nowadays as development economics from economics (Sen, 1988). Moreover, this discipline has proven rather pervasive in its influence since it has not lost its grip on the term. Indeed, as Woolcock (in Sumner & Tribe 2008, p. 73) asserts "there can be little doubt that, for better or worse, economics is the lingua franca of international development". Because of this, it is warranted to set out the discussion of development from this perspective.

From its inception, the discussion around development has turned around both economic growth and the standard of living (Sen 1988) as if they were the two sides of the same coin. In this sense, human well-being has been recognized as relevant for development for quite some time. This element has been carried to current discussions through the different shapes taken by the dominant approach. In so doing, however, these versions have not overcome important limitations.

Capital accumulation, in its different measurements, has been the most influential approach to well-being achievement. This approach has sought to assess nation performance on the basis of a national income per capita indicator. Accordingly, economic growth, measured by GNP per capita, has become the dominant method (Alkire, 2010; Dowrick, 2007). The locus of attention, therefore, has been on capital accumulation. The implication being that the greater the accumulation, the higher the level of development. Material prosperity, from this perspective, has a rather direct connection to welfare (Sen, 1988).

This approach offers some advantages. In practical terms, its measurement is relatively easy, its fabrication is rather difficult, and it permits comparability (Nussbaum, 2011). In abstract terms, such indicators' relationship to human well-being have been supported by the persuasive philosophical tradition of utilitarianism. Measurements of opulence, are consistent with a utilitarian conceptualization of well-being: higher income allows more consumption, which in turn increases utility (McGillivray, 2007).

This link between opulence and well-being has been supported by several assumptions. For example, the idea that increments in growth also increases people's income, which improves their quality of life (Alkire & Deneulin, 2010a). It is assumed of course that additional income is spent not saved, i.e. a non-miser is assumed. Additionally, an increase in national growth is believed to benefit all members of the population. These

further resonate with 'trickle-down' hypotheses. Similarly, a focus on resources implies a reliance on the information provided by the market as well as by prices.

Nevertheless, the focus on the power over resources suffers from important limitations. Even within the same economistic tradition, doubt has been casted over its pertinence for welfarist distributional analysis. Indeed, it is not income but consumption expenditure that "[…] enters the individual's utility function" (Jenkins & Van Kerm 2009, p. 42). In this case, the actual exercise of power or command over economic resources is privileged rather than the access or control over them.

Furthermore, there can be growth without development. The evidence shows that growth can coexist with considerable levels of destitution (Ranis, Stewart and Ramirez, 2000; Clower *et al.*, 1966). At the extreme, one can imagine a country where production is generated by a population enslaved by one person who receives all income. Increments in productivity, perhaps due to worsening exploitative working conditions, may lead to higher growth but one would be hard pressed to say that the country has developed. In other words, growth says nothing, about relevant aspects such as distribution (Sen, 1988).

Moreover, even if GDP per capita is used (so as to try to account for distribution), it still obscures relevant factors without ridding the approach of questionable assumptions. Aspects relevant to people's quality of life such as particular needs, happiness (Alkire & Deneulin, 2010b; Sen 1999), and inequality (Sen, 1988) are omitted. To insist, pecuniary indicators capture only the control over means, not what people are actually able to achieve by exercising that power.

As mentioned above, an alternative indicator could be consumption expenditures. However, this indicator has limitations of its own. Although this enters the utility function directly, it does so in a rather partial manner since it still misses interpersonal variation. This is an important shortcoming since it refers to human diversity. Different people with different characteristics may (and in fact do) require different quantities and qualities of consumption in order to achieve analogous levels of utility (Sen, 1992). For example, two adult males with the same features but different occupations, one having an intellectually demanding job and the other a physically taxing job, may have quite different dietary needs.

Additionally, since growth is based on market prices, if important information is missing from those prices, the account provided by growth will likely show yet another limitation. And there is indeed significant information missing from prices. Perhaps one of the most relevant issues nowadays is the encumbrance on the planet's resources (Alkire, 2010). That is, as straightforward as the accounting of growth may be, its makeup does not show all the relevant information, as it should.

Similarly, because growth factors in only formal market activity, significant activity not included in the market is omitted (Klugman, Roodríguez & Choi, 2011). This means that relevant activity, of special interest in developing contexts, such as household production and leisure (Dowrick, 2007) is left out.

Further, growth suggests that income per capita can comprise other well-being dimensions. It assumes that a single figure can account for inherently distinct aspects of life (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 2000). This opposes the incommensurate nature of well-being dimensions, while experience shows otherwise. Nevertheless, until the turn of the century "GNP per capita [continued] to be regarded as the 'quintessential' well-being indicator" (Dasgupta, 2001, p. 53).

Despite the efforts to connect income to well-being by way of standard of living, most clearly by associating it to peoples' utility, capital accumulation still captures only the one side of the coin, namely, growth, omitting the other, human well-being. This discussion, however, has served the purpose to identify the two main traditions around which the debate about development seems to turn: utilitarianism and resourcism.

3. Against utilitarianism and resourcism

The dominant approach finds considerable support on rather important strands of political philosophy. The most conspicuous ones are related to subjective well-being and access to resources. In Sen's (1988) perspective, these would highlight the competitive plurality that stems from the inherent diversity in the notion of development, particularly as it relates to human well-being. To be sure, subjective well-being and access to resources are not independent of one another, as the discussion above highlights but, as Sen (1988) establishes, in their pure forms, they are alternatives to each other. In this sense, this section discusses both utilitarianism and resourcism in terms of how well they address the

interest of development in human well-being. While the former is consequentialist or teleological, the latter is causalist or deontological[3]. The CA's rejection of the conventional approach encompasses a critique to both approaches. In this section, much like Sen has frequently done, that argument is presented before elaborating on the CA in depth in the next.

3.1. Utilitarianism

The normative aspect of the concept of development demands an answer to the question 'what is good change?' Given that, from the discussion above, the issue is how to account for human well-being, this immediately turns into the question 'what is valuable for human well-being?' This is a question of the adequate informational space for such evaluations. In providing an answer, utilitarianism determines *utility* as the object of value[4]. So conceived, utility refers to certain mental states that are regarded as intrinsically valuable. In this sense, utilitarianism seeks to highlight both individual well-being and individual outcomes. It does so via at least three definitions variants of the concept of utility: pleasure, desire fulfillment and choice.

Regarding utility as pleasure, also conceived as happiness or satisfaction, it is rather conspicuous that it constitutes an object with intrinsic value. Less evident is whether it can be the sole object of value. One can imagine an individual in such a state of destitution and exploitation who has learnt by different means to find pleasure in small mercies so as to cope with their situation. This has been referred to in the literature as 'adaptive preferences.' In such cases, it would be quite difficult to suggest that the individual is doing well because he shows some level of satisfaction or happiness. Therefore, as valuable as satisfaction may be, it cannot be the only object of value. It is certainly relevant for evaluation of people's well-being but it is not exclusively relevant.

Apropos utility as desire fulfillment, its relevance as an object of value might be even more doubtful. This notion can be analyzed in terms of desire and in terms of fulfilment. First,

[3] This essay follows, however loosely, John Rawls' (1972) definition of deontology as that which is not teleology. Since teleology focuses on the consequences or ends, it could be argued that deontology, at least, acknowledges the causes or the means. Although his discussion is about moral philosophy, it seems just as useful for present purposes. To be sure, the literature does not adhere to this terminology, however it can highlight a central contribution that Sen's CA seeks to make, namely, a move from the means to the ends of development.

[4] This is not to be confused with utility as a valuational devise to assess other objects of value (Sen 1988)

the argument can be made that the desire for something is proportional to the satisfaction derived from it. This, however, does not place value in desire itself and therefore fall outside current purposes[5]. Can desire be valuable in and of itself? Desiring has a valuational aspect but it is not a valuational activity (Sen, 1988). More often than not one desires something because it is valuable, not the other way around. Desire is instrumental for the pursuit of personal aspirations. Interpersonal comparisons of desires show as much. Both what someone desires as well as how much they desire it is influenced by their circumstances. Rich and poor people desire things that are within their reach. Therefore, lack of desire for valuable things beyond one's means does not entail shortcomings in valuing but an alignment of what is expected with what is feasible. Therefore, making interpersonal comparisons of well-being on the basis of desire does not seem warranted (Sen, 1988). Second, and by the same token, the fulfillment of someone's desire may or may not say something about that person's well-being (Sen, 1988). The destitute may be able to fulfil their desires but if the latter are miniscule (because of the aforementioned alignment), it can hardly be said that much success has been achieved.

Finally, when it comes to choice, the case does not fare much better. In economics the focus on choice is presumably related to the positivist philosophy of science on which it builds. Choice is believed to be the only aspect of human behavior that can be observed. Privileging observation, as positivism does, economics focuses on the one trait that can be captured with the net at its disposal. Choice can be considered as a reflection of desire and, thus, shares its shortcomings as an indicator of well-being. Moreover, choice is associated with motivation and equating choice with well-being is reducing it to only one aspect of motivation, i.e. egoistic goals. This excludes other important motivations on the basis of which people also choose, such as altruistic ones. It could be argued that the connection between choice and well-being is more direct since failure to achieve what one chooses causes dissatisfaction, discontent and frustration, i.e. disutility. However, these effects provide a doubtful reflection of well-being since the intent in choice is to achieve some goal not to avoid disappointment. To reiterate, this applies to desires as well.

Consequently, utilitarianism provides important insights for the analysis of well-being but, regardless of the precise definition of utility, it also has important shortcomings as an account of human well-being. Happiness is of particular importance as it is an element of

[5] Sen (1988) elaborates thoroughly the argument of the limitations of satisfaction as the basis for valuation for something else. That 'something else' in this case is desire so the argument applies.

well-being. Even then, however, it constitutes only one aspect. As such, whatever it may say about the issue is partial at best.

Utilitarianism and its subjective measures like happiness or (life) satisfaction has the benefit of focusing on people (Alkire & Deneulin, 2010b). In this sense, it is consequentialist, i.e. the locus of attention is on ends. However, its disadvantages seem to outweigh its advantages. Utility measurements face the problems of comparability across individuals, the obscurity of inequality in a distribution (Nussbaum, 2011), and adaptive preferences (Sen, 1999). As in the case of GDP per capita, use of 'satisfaction' as an all-purpose metric suggests singleness and commensurability, which is contradicted by experience (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 2000). Further, it has been challenged whether subjective well-being measures utility – as conventional economics conceives of it – or features of individuals' perceptions of their experiences (Kahneman & Krueger, 2006). Likewise, and on the practical side, subjective data can be highly unreliable (Gershuny, 2011; Deaton, 1997) and, although there has been progress in the measurement of subjective well-being, it remains daunting (Dolan, Layard & Metcalfe, 2011).

3.2. Resourcism

At the other side of the consequentialist subjectivist approach lies the causalist objectivist one. From a focus on money to attention to a wider array of means and resources, this approach to well-being has also proven to be quite influential. The term 'resourcism' is borrowed from moral philosophy, holding that "distributive justice should ignore the distribution of capabilities and focus instead on the distribution of external resources such as money, land, foodstuffs, etc. [and it] disregards the differences between individuals that render them differentially able to convert resources into achievements" (Kelleher 2015, p. 152).

To be sure, although utilitarianism and resourcism are distinguishable traditions, they are not independent of each other. As was mentioned above and is elaborated further below, for instance, ownership of resources is associated with well-being via consumption's entry into the utility function. Nevertheless, the resource-based approach is a distinct proposition and, as such, warrants dedicated discussion. Hence, at least two influential versions merit attention: opulence widely conceived and, a broader and more abstract one, primary goods.

Such approach is best captured by opulence and ownership over resources. As such, it is directly related to the brief discussion introduced at the outset of this chapter. Any pecuniary indicator signaling commodity possession provides important information regarding well-being. The degree of command over resources has been directly associated with well-being: the higher the degree of command, the higher the level of well-being. As mentioned above, the case is often made in terms of how this command translates into consumption, which ultimately enters the utility function. However, the argument has also been made in terms of the advantages of this approach in and of itself.

From the perspective of opulence, the more capital an individual possesses, the higher their well-being. Therefore, the latter can be adequately captured by measuring the former. This proposition is not unfounded. An individual's well-being may depend on the means and resources available to them. Replacing dirt floors with wooden ones, exchanging a timber-based kitchenette for a gas- or electricity- based one, leaving an unsafe neighborhood for a safer one, are all examples of how well-being is related to opulence.

Despite its original intuitiveness, its association with well-being can be rather suspect. In close attention, it is evident that income or wealth, or any other pecuniary metric for that matter, can only capture well-being partially. First, there is the issue of commensurability. At best, opulence can adequately capture one dimension, material well-being. There are other rather important dimensions for well-being that are left unaccounted for with an exclusive focus on opulence. A telling example can be health. Although higher wealth can contribute to alleviate the condition of people afflicted by certain illnesses, there are others such as terminal diseases or disabilities for which money cannot compensate. In fact, people in some regions of the world enjoy higher life expectancies than people in other regions with higher incomes[6] (Sen 1999). Pecuniary indicators, such as income per capita, can account for well-being but only partially since it captures but one dimension: material well-being. Hence, measuring development with this indicator is tantamount to reducing well-being to well-off, mistaking thereby well-being with well-having (Sen, 1985).

[6] A telling example is provided by Sen (1999, p. 48) when he states: "[…] the Indian state of Kerala has achieved impressively high life expectancy, low fertility, high literacy and so on despite its low income level per head […]"

Second, pecuniary indicators fail to account for human diversity. Opulence metrics, in practice, are usually employed to establish a cutoff point under which people's well-being is threatened and above which it is secured. People, however, are plural in nature and are surrounded by a diversity of contexts. Thus, different people in different contexts are likely to require different amounts of resources in order to achieve analogous levels of well-being. For instance, a pregnant woman, an old man, and young athlete, all can have different dietary demands in order to be well-nourished. This signals to a third and fundamental shortcoming, namely, well-being is an achievement. One is or is not well. That is, it is a result or consequence, whereas opulence captures only a cause, and a limited one.

Primary goods do not seem to fare much better. The idea of primary goods has perhaps best been introduced by the political theorist John Rawls in his contribution to his theorizing of justice as fairness. In this sense,

> Primary goods are things needed and required by persons seen in the light of the political conception of persons, as citizens who are fully cooperating members of society, and not merely as human beings apart from any normative conception. These goods are things citizens need as free and equal persons living a complete life; they are not things it is simply rational to want or desire, or to prefer or even to crave (Rawls 2001, p. 58)

Rawls (2001) distinguishes five kinds of such goods, namely: i) basic rights and liberties; ii) freedom of movement and free choice of occupation; iii) powers and prerogatives of offices and positions of authority and responsibility; iv) income and wealth; v) the social bases of self-respect. In this sense, primary goods are general purpose means to pursue certain ends deemed valuable by a given individual, according to their conception of the good. This conception, of course, includes one's well-being. Two issues are worth addressing: the step forward and the step backwards.

The inclusion of various elements, particularly freedom and rights, is certainly a step forwards in the consideration of well-being. Attention to primary goods expands the informational base on which assessments of well-being take place. In this sense, it moves beyond monetary indicators to account for non-material aspects of well-being. This recognition in and of itself, more than a step, is perhaps a leap forward. Moreover, the

inclusion of freedom and rights is momentous as it highlights an important aspect of well-being. A person who enjoys greater freedoms and whose rights are protected does experience more well-being than someone with less of either or both.

As important as this step may be, it is held back by the very nature of primary goods and their focus on the holdings over resources. This is because the translation from access to means to well-being is far from direct. The relationship between resources and well-being can vary with variations of different interpersonal and intergroup features (Sen, 1992). The conversion of primary goods into well-being depends on personal characteristics of each individual as well as on the characteristics of the social, cultural and even the geographical environment surrounding them (Sen, 1999).

Since Rawls' intention is to propose a theory of justice, his main concern is with the distribution of those primary goods, whence his suggestion of the 'veil of ignorance' and the 'difference principle' (see Rawls, 2001). His proposal entails a requirement of basal equality, equalizing primary goods. However, even while bringing necessary attention to freedoms, its focus on resources and means proves to be rather limited. Its causalist position, as it has been referred to in this chapter, fails to provide an adequate account of well-being because it does not allow for assessments that respect human diversity. Different people in different contexts may require different qualities and quantities of resources in order to achieve analogous (or the same) outcomes[7].

4. Human development

The CA constitutes a conceptual framework to define development. As such, rather than being an explanatory theory suggesting how development can be achieved, it suggests a descriptive and normative account of how development can and should be understood. Although this approach has maintained its people-centered focus, placing humans and their quality of life as the ends of development, it has also shown change over time, reflecting the evolution in Sen's ideas. In this sense, the notion of human agency is particular interest. Hence, in order to present Sen's CA in its own terms, this section elaborates the framework's current version, resorting to the historic literature to the extent that it aids in shedding light on the main concepts advanced by the approach.

[7] The same argument applies to Ronald Dworkin's focus on 'equality of resources'.

The CA places humans, and their lives, at the center of development. It argues that people are the ends of development and that the latter ought to be assessed in terms of people's quality of life (Sen, 1999). Differing from measures of opulence, which focus on the means instead of on the ends of development, for the CA, income (or wealth) *per capita* is only instrumentally important; that is, it is only valuable to the extent it enables the achievement of intrinsically valuable aspects of life.

Five concepts are of special interest for current purposes: functionings, capability, well-being, agency and conversion factors. In what follows each is elaborated as well as the dynamics among them.

4.1. Evaluation space: functionings and capabilities

Functionings and capabilities refer to the evaluative spaces and, thus, reflect the CA's multidimensionality. *Functionings* are the achieved 'doings' and 'beings' (e.g. being literate or healthy, having professional realization, having information) that people value and have reason to value (Sen, 1999). That is, they are reflected-upon, valued kinds of lives (Sen 1993). An individual's achievements, therefore, can be regarded as the vector of their functionings (Sen, 1992). In this sense, living can be regarded as consisting of interrelated beings and doings (Sen, 1992). As such, they are constitutive to an individual's being (Sen 1990).

> The valued functionings may vary from elementary ones, such as being adequately nourished and being free from avoidable disease, to very complex activities or personal states, such as being able to take part in the life of the community and having self respect (Sen, 1999, p. 75).

Functionings, therefore, are personal and multidimensional. They are personal in that they reflect people's values and their idea of the good. Moreover, by being life types that people pursue, they are characteristics of people. This is a fundamental difference from other approaches such resource-based ones as these focus on the features of resources or commodities, not on people (Sen, 1988). They are multidimensional in that their focus on a wide array of reflected upon valuable doings and beings recognizes the incommensurability of human experience, rejecting thereby the use of only one metric, be it opulence (as in resourcism) or utility (as in utilitarianism).

Capability can be regarded as the vector of the potential functionings that an individual can achieve (Sen, 1999). It denotes, someone's capability to function (Sen, 1992). It comprises all the possible functionings from which an individual can choose (e.g. having the choice: to be a mother, to pursue certain career regardless of gender, to earn the same wage for the same work regardless of any other factor, to elect and be elected, should these options be deemed valuable after reflection). Thus, it denotes the freedom one has to lead different valuable reflected upon lives (Sen, 1993). A valuable life is composed by both a person's doings and beings as well as the freedom to undertake them (Crocker and Robeyns, 2010). According to Sen (1999), development should be ideally considered in the space of capabilities. Therefore, he redefines development as *freedom*.

In this sense, Sen (1997) not only focuses on outcomes but in how they are reached. One can imagine two people, who value the same kind of live and enjoy the achievement of the same levels of doings and beings, but if these were imposed on one while the other had other options to choose from, it is clear that the latter enjoys a better quality of life. In this sense, focusing on outcomes only may be insufficient. This is what Sen (1997) calls 'culmination outcomes', in contrast to 'comprehensive outcomes', which take into consideration how those final outcomes came about, i.e. the process leading to them.

The capability approach focuses on people and their quality of life. It regards the improvement in people's lives as an expansion of their freedom. Therefore, from this perspective, development is about enlarging people's choices in all dimensions of life (Haq, 2004). Indeed, Mahbub ul Haq (2004, p. 31), one of the most relevant contributors to the approach, perhaps put it best[8]:

> The human development paradigm covers all aspects of development – whether economic growth or international trade; budget deficits or fiscal policy; savings, investment or technology; basic social services or safety nets for the poor. No aspect of the development model falls outside its scope, but point of references remains the widening of people's choices and the enrichment of their lives. All aspects of life – economic, political or cultural – are viewed from that perspective.

[8] Although Haq talks about the human development approach, the contribution is pertinent since "[…] there is no consensus as to a *conceptually* clear distinction between human development and the capability approach, nor is it obvious that such a distinction is useful or required" (Alkire 2010, p. 22, emphasis in the original)

> Economic growth therefore becomes only a subset of the human development paradigm.

Capability also underlines the CA's focus on human beings. It highlights human plurality in recognizing that there may be many doings and beings that are valuable after reflection, and many lives that can be legitimately led. As such, it recognizes the importance of command over resources or material opulence, but emphasizes that its value is instrumental, to the extent it enables people to reach intrinsically valuable objectives. Therefore, whether one assesses states of a person or a country, what matters is not the presence or extent of opulence but how that opulence is used (Sen, 1999). Moreover, capability is also a personal factor, since capabilities are bundles of functionings, which are constitutive of an individual's being. Additionally, it acknowledges that being able to choose from meaningful kinds of life is part of well-being. Similarly, as in the case of functionings, it stresses the multidimensional nature of human experience as well.

In this sense, although related to functionings, capability does not denote achievements but the freedom to achieve. "Freedom can be distinguished *both* from the *means* that sustain it and from the *achievements* that it sustains" (Sen, 1992, p. 86, emphasis in the original). Furthermore, even though they are distinct, freedoms are not independent from one another. Expansion in some may contribute to the expansion of others. Hence, freedom is the primary end and the principal means of development, also referred to as the constitutive and instrumental role of freedom in development, respectively (Sen, 1999).

Importantly, Sen (1988) emphasizes the difference between negative and positive freedoms, emphasizing the benefits of encompassing both. Negative freedoms can be usefully regarded as 'being free from' (as in the libertarian tradition). That is, the focus is on the absence of constraints to the exercise of that freedom. In this sense, the attention is placed on the correctness of the process underlying and governing social behavior. An example can be the freedom to earn the same wage for the same job in the labor market regardless of sex, ethnicity, age or any other factor. As important as this is, if the interest is in the actual quality of life achieved by people, then such approach does not suffice. It is necessary to consider the positive freedom of being able to choose, i.e. 'being free to'. This focuses on the opportunity to achieve and, as such, is a relevant functioning in its own

right[9] (Sen, 1988). Thus, this aspect of freedom, paying attention to meaningful exercises of choice, can be included in the evaluation of functionings by 'refined functionigs', which are functionings that take into consideration the availability of options (Sen, 1988). Consequently, both process and opportunity are aspects of freedom that need to be taken into account in development assessments (Sen, 1999). Nonetheless, Sen (2005) acknowledges that the capability perspective is better equipped to account for the latter.

4.2. Motivation: agency and well-being

Regarding, well-being and agency, they can be considered as the categories approximating motivation. *Well-being* refers to an individual's quality of being (Sen, 1999). That is, it refers exclusively to her personal 'wellness' (Sen, 1992) or welfare (Sen, 1993). This category denotes solely an individual's own states (e.g. being well nourished, being employed, enjoying leisure time, having self-esteem).

Agency, in turn, refers to what a person does or can do in order to pursue *any* of her goals and objectives, not just those that advance her own wellness. It is an evaluation of "what a person can do in line with his or her conception of the good" (Sen, 1985, p. 206). Hence, agency encompasses self-interest or self-regarding motivation (well-being) as well as other-regarding motivation (Crocker and Robeyns, 2010) (e.g. volunteering at a hospital, sponsoring the education of a child, demonstrating in favor of LGBTQ rights, donating blood or organs, philanthropic activities of different sorts). Under this framework, agency denotes the extent to which people can control, influence and change the features of their environment in the pursuit of their goals.

Furthermore, agency is also conceived more broadly, as part of an account of human beings. Sen (1999, p. 19) regards agency "[...] in its older – and 'grander' – sense as someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well". As such, two elements are underscored: i) acting and bringing about change, and ii) judging those actions and changes as well as their underlying values and preferences.

[9] Whether or not this functioning is included in a list of valuable doings and beings is a discussion that exceeds the scope of this chapter. For current purposes suffice it to cite Sen (1988, p. 17) when he states: "the list of functionings need not include "choosing" as such, but the value of choosing will be reflected in the evaluation by making that evaluation depend both on the chosen n-tuple of functionings, and on the nature and the range of the capability set itself."

From a public policy perspective, therefore, the stress is on regarding people as agents of change with the ability to shape their lives, not as passive recipients of policy (Sen, 1999).

The notion of agency, however, has endured relevant changes. Until 1992, Sen rejected a common association of freedom with direct control on agency-related grounds. "Freedom as control" was opposed due to its exclusive focus on people having the levers or power for the capabilities they enjoy, arguing that "[m]any freedoms take the form of our ability to get what we value and want, without the levers of control being *directly* operated by us" (Sen, 1992, p. 64). Accordingly, a differentiation was made between "realized agency success" and "instrumental agency success". The latter was concerned with those outcomes brought about by the agent themselves and, as such, conveyed the idea of freedom as control. The former, in turn, was broader and encompassed all outcomes, whether the agent was determinant in achieving them or not (Sen, 1992). Thereafter, however, that rejection and differentiation seems to have been dropped, suggesting that the CA no longer rejects the equivalence of freedom as control.

Importantly, there may be tension between agency and well-being goals. Whenever the pursuit of other-regarding objectives curtails self-regarding ones, there is a tradeoff. Following the examples above, donating bone marrow or a kidney to someone presumably entails a reduction in the donor's well-being while increasing their agency.

Additionally, functionings and capabilities can be manifested both in terms of agency and also in terms of well-being (see Table 1). The relationship between functionings and well-being is perhaps intuitive since a person's welfare is dependent on their achievements, or the nature of their being. Whether basic functionings such as being literate or advanced ones like being self-confident, what a person does and is must be intrinsically important for the wellness of that person's being (Sen, 1992). When it comes to well-being capabilities, the relationship can be established in a twofold manner. First, there is well-being freedom. This is the implication of capabilities being the set of all reasoned and valuable functionings. Since functionings are constitutive to a person's well-being and

capability is the vector of meaningful functionings, then capability is a person's freedom to have well-being[10] (Sen, 1992).

Second, achieved well-being can be regarded as dependent on the capability to function. This highlights the importance of choosing as intrinsically important for people's lives when there are real opportunities enabling reflective choice. The point is that, when assessing states, how a life style has occurred is itself relevant, not only that it has occurred. After all, a valuable achievement (say, being married) is likely to be more valuable if it is the product of reasoned choice (when the people involved have had meaningful options [including not to marry] or suitors to choose from) than otherwise (as in the case of arranged marriages). Hence, well-being achievements are not independent of the process leading to them, as some capabilities may contribute directly to well-being (Sen, 1992).

Concerning the expression of functionings and capabilities in terms of agency, the relationships are expectedly similar. Apropos agency functionings, they are all the achievements that a person values and has reason to value (whether or not they are related to well-being). Being a superset of well-being, agency is also constitutive to a person's being. The goals a person seeks are the manifestations of their identity (Sen, 2007). This is so for self-regarding objectives as well as for other-regarding ones. Since the previous paragraph discussed the former, this one shall focus on the latter for analytic purposes, without reducing 'agency' solely to altruistic motivations. In this sense, non-self-interested achievements (e.g. men demonstrating in favor of the legalization of abortion, locals fighting for the rights of immigrants, going on a hunger strike for political prisoners, skipping one day of school every week to protest climate change) also constitute the nature of a person's being and, thus, they should enter the evaluation of a person's life.

Importantly, as can be gathered from the above, for the CA, agency (and well-being) functionings are about achievements, i.e. fulfilling objectives and values. This means successfully bringing about a desired goal. As Sen (1992, p. 56) has put it:

> A person's agency achievement refers to the realization of goals and values she has

[10] As Sen (1992) points out, well-being capability can be assessed as desirable for instrumental as well as intrinsic reasons. Instrumentally, as argued in this section, it reflects the real opportunities people have to achieve well-being. In this sense, it shows the hand that people have been dealt. Intrinsically, it is worth highlighting the value that freedom has in and of itself. "A good society is also a society of freedom" (Sen, 1992, p. 41).

> reasons to pursue, whether or not they are connected with her own well-being. A person as an agent need not be guided only by her own well-being, and agency achievement refers to the person's success in the pursuit of the totality of her considered goals and objectives.

As in the case above, the relationship between agency and capabilities also points to the intrinsic value of choice. Agency freedom is about the real opportunity an individual has to obtain or reach the achievements they have reason to value and seek to realize.

Although distinguishable, agency and well-being are interdependent (Sen, 1992). On the one hand, well-being or the pursuit of self-regarding aims can be one of the goals that an individual qua agent values and has reason to value. On the other hand, other-regarding achievements can contribute to the agent's well-being. By the same token, the lack of achievement in other-regarding aims can be detrimental to well-being.

Much more can (and will) be said about agency. That is the subject matter of the next chapter. For present purposes, suffice it to establish its definition and its relationship with the other main notions of the CA, namely, well-being, functionings and capabilities.

Table 1. Combination of agency and Well-being with functionings and capability

		Motivations	
		Well-being	Agency
Evaluative space	Functionings	Well-being achievement	Agency achievement
	Capability	Well-being freedom	Agency freedom

Source: Crocker and Robeyns (2010)
Elaboration: author

4.3. Intervening elements: conversion factors

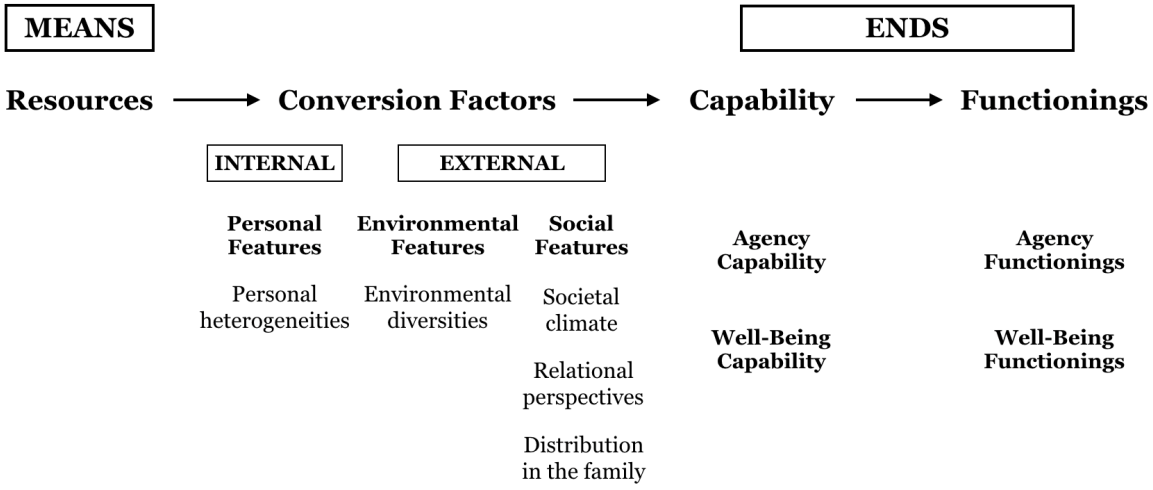
Translating resources into functionings and capabilities, whether related to well-being or agency, is not direct. This process is mediated by *conversion factors*, which encompass

internal as well as external characteristics that can influence the extent to which capabilities can be enjoyed and functionings obtained (see Figure 1). Sen (1999) distinguishes the following conversion factors:

1. Personal heterogeneities: diverse physical or mental characteristics inherent to individuals such as gender, age, presence of disability, or ethnicity, make their needs dissimilar. In order to experience an analogous quality of life, a person with disabilities, a pregnant woman, someone with nutritional limitation because of their religious beliefs or someone with a physically demanding job for instance, require different amounts of resources than people who do not share these characteristics.
2. Environmental diversities: the effect that resources can have on people's quality of life differs according to variation in environmental conditions in which people live. People around the equator, for example, do not have to adjust their clothing and infrastructure for the extreme climates experienced with some seasons in the North and South, neither do inhabitants in regions where storms and hurricanes are not usual as people who live where they are. Similarly, the presence of draughts, pollution, endemic diseases, inter alia, are other relevant characteristics of the environment.
3. Variations in social climate: social conditions can also influence the rate at which people can transform income into intrinsically valuable goals. The presence of crime, the refusal of parents to vaccinate their children, the provision of public services, and the character of community relationships (as in social capital) among others are some illustrations.
4. Differences in relational perspectives: different customs and conventions can lead to variation in the commodity requirements of established patterns of behavior, which affect people's translation of instrumentally valuable things into intrinsically valuable ones. Basic functionings such as taking part in the life of the community, appearing in public without shame, and even self-respect may demand different amounts of resources in different communities: more in richer circles and less in poorer ones.

5. Distribution within the family[11]: variation in how household income is distributed within its members can have an influence in the turning resources into functionings and capabilities.

Figure 1. Illustration of the CA's movement from means to ends



Source: based on Sen (1999)
Elaboration: author

The previous discussion leads to diversity or the CA's recognition of human diversity, which occurs in at least two ways: the possible ends and the possible means to those ends. Sen (1992) has referred to the former as inter-end variation and to the latter as inter-individual variation. On the one hand, to the extent people have different meaningful and reasoned doings and beings, whether achieved or achievable, there is diversity in terms of the ends they pursue. This is increased by the CA's attention to agency. That is, the exercise of freedom to lead the lives people have reason to value entails that there is virtually an infinite number of legitimate lives people can lead.

On the other, even in the case of similar ends, different people in different contexts may require different quantities or qualities of resources to achieve them. In the case of a given end, the attention to specific personal as well as environmental and social characteristics

[11] Interestingly, the latter seems to have lost prominence in Sen's later work without much explanation (see e.g. Sen 2009; 2005).

highlights the fact that with similar resources, there can be a considerable number of pathways to that end. This appears to be a tacit assumption in development policy since it often entails a standard intervention affecting certain individuals or groups in society and expecting them to meet a minimum score on an indicator considered desirable, despite their plurality.

These variations are deeply interrelated. The actual freedom that an individual may have to pursue their valued ends depends on two factors: i) the ends that they have; and, ii) the power they have to convert resources or means into the achievement of those ends (Sen, 1992), which are their personal features (gender, class status, age, ethnicity, etc.), and the context in which they live (the country's capital, a religious family, a patriarchic society, etc.).

Again, for policy purposes, even in the case of a given end, although the challenge posed by inter-end variation is attenuated, the challenge posed by inter-individual variation remains. This goes against the rhetoric or belief conventionally assumed in welfare economic theory, that everyone is essentially similar, having the same maximal potentials (Sen, 1992) or, in other words, that 'all men (humans) are created equal'. For the CA, consequently, Human diversity is a fundamental aspect of well-being. As such, it cannot be simplified and it ought to be factored in the analysis of development (policy).

5. The CA in practice: scope and limitations

Because of the characteristics just described, Sen's CA has been described as "quintessentially a public policy approach" (Gasper, 2007, p. 344). Indeed, it has gained much currency among academics and practitioners. Its adoption by the UN and the increasingly relevant Human Development Reports and Human Development Index (in any of its versions) speak volumes of its influence. Nevertheless, because of its very nature, employing the CA for empirical exercises has proven rather challenging leading to some critiques (see e.g. Srinivasan, 1994; Sugden, 1993). So much so that some "[…] have suggested that the 'multidimensional-context-dependent-counterfactual-normative' nature of the CA might prevent it from having practical and operational significance" (Comim, 2008, p. 160). In this section, therefore, some of the main characteristics of the approach, as it pertains to empirical and conceptual issues, are presented. Three themes are explored: selection and valuation, practical compromises, and under-theorization. To

be sure, they do not exhaust all the criticisms raised against the CA, but arguably encompass the prominent objections. As above, this discussion is presented as the CA itself has elaborated them.

5.1. Selection and valuation

In practice, and specially for policy and program analysis, it is necessary to define the ends of interest[12]. Whether functionings or capability, the question as to what is of value demands an answer for practical purposes. This means that empirically selecting what are the important functionings and capabilities is unavoidable. As such, once it is accepted that the relevant space for evaluation is related to functionings and capabilities, given the multidimensionality entailed by both, the next is a discussion about which dimensions relevant to the quality of life are to be privileged. This entails real choice and process of evaluation from which there is no escape (Sen, 1992).

Not all functionings and capabilities are important, let alone equally relevant, just by virtue of being such. There are some that are of little interest while there are other rather significant, which are referred to as substantive freedoms (Sen, 1999). The CA proposes that in well-being assessments the value objects are functionings and capabilities. This does not mean that all types of achievements and freedoms are equally valuable neither does it mean that all such objects have some value for a person, regardless of their effect on that person's life. The discrimination exercise to distinguish meaningful functionings and capabilities from negligible or trivial ones turns around the underlying concerns and values (Sen, 1992). Even in the case of the important ones, they would have to be weighted vis-à-vis each other.

According to the CA, these differences can be accounted for, to a certain extent. Sen (1999) suggests that weights can be attached to different freedoms, providing thereby a partial ranking or ordering that can prove useful. This is because of the nature of freedom, which is inherently contested. The CA's goal, however, is not to provide a complete ordering of all states, as suggesting some ideal state to be reached, but to put in the locus of attention those social aspects warranting improvement on which agreement can be found.

[12] Robeyns (2006, p. 353) refers to this as three theoretical specifications: "the choice between functionings and capabilities, the selection of relevant capabilities, and the issue of weighting the different capabilities for an overall assessment (also known as the question of indexing or trade-offs)."

Certainly, this leaves possible overall rankings as an issue of contention. Nevertheless, Sen (1999) argues that this does not undermine the approach. What would be damaging is neglecting relevant concerns because of omission of freedoms of those involved.

Because of the lack of selection and the absence of a definitive list, the CA has been regarded as incomplete. The relevant literature recognizes the difficulties of this endeavor, however, there have been attempts to provide such list. One of the main contributors in this regard, and perhaps the best illustration, has been Martha Nussbaum (2006), who proposes ten capabilities that ought to be included in the constitutions of all countries (and thus hers is referred to as 'the capabilities [plural] approach'), namely: i) Life; ii) Bodily Health; iii) Bodily Integrity; iv) Senses, Imagination, and Thought; v) Emotions; vi) Practical Reason; vii) Affiliation; viii) Other Species; iv) Play; and, x) Control over One's Environment

Nussbaum's contribution shares much with Sen's approach since it is consequentialist, ethically individualist and multidimensional. The evaluative space is the quality of life people value and the aspects that have intrinsic importance. The focus is on the freedom and achievements of individuals. This decalogue encompasses a wide array of dimensions of human experience. However, Sen has not endorsed this list, or any list for that matter. The reason lies in the fact that Sen's CA rejects any general-purpose approach to the assessment of social states due to its notion of agency.

Sen's CA acknowledges the importance of selecting relevant dimensions and precisely because of this he has refused to endorse a particular final all-purpose list. As mentioned above, this approach privileges human diversity and free agency. This entails that selecting the relevant dimensions on which functionings and capability (or lack thereof) are to be assessed is a matter of public debate (Sen, 2004; 1999). In fact, when it comes to attaching weights to different functionings and capabilities for social evaluation, the CA suggests such judgmental exercise has to be the result of a reasoned consensus or agreement based on open public deliberation and critical scrutiny. This is a social choice problem that demands a democratic process.

This suggestion applies to the three situations highlighting the CA's pluralism. First, as mentioned above, there are some functionings and capabilities that are more important than others, which requires weighting. Second, the importance of substantive freedom

(the capability set) vis-à-vis actual achievement (the functioning vector) is also a matter of judgment, which requires weighting as well. Third, there is the relevance that processes and rules (process freedoms) can have vis-à-vis capabilities (opportunity or substantive freedoms). To recall, in all these cases, the matter at hand is human heterogeneity. In this sense, the capability perspective is not only "inescapably pluralist" (Sen 1999, p. 76) but necessarily democratic.

Hence, from this perspective, no 'complete ordering' of meaningful ends can be suggested. Indeed, well-being is an admittedly broad and partly opaque concept and trying to provide a ranking without room for ambiguity and incompleteness goes against the nature of these concepts and runs the risk of overprecision (Sen, 1992). Thus, depending on the exercise, different orderings in the prioritization of dimensions may apply and this is a call that only those affected by the evaluation can make. Any given list, comprising the doings and beings that people value and have reason to value (which are constitutive of their beings), ought to reflect those people's conception of the good and ought to be the product of those people's exercise of agency. Therefore, the shape that a list should take is a matter best left for the public sphere (Sen, 2004). In this sense, what has been criticized as underspecification is in fact taking free agency seriously.

5.2. Practical compromises

The capability perspective advances a richer evaluative space and, by so doing, enlarges the informational base. This has implications for empirical applications of the approach. Capabilities themselves may present the greatest challenge. Nevertheless, this is attenuated, to an extent, by the ambitions and expectations of empirical exercises[13], which are adjusted to practical considerations. From fully-fletched applications to limited ones, the CA seems to be amenable to different strategies.

Conventional assessments of the options available within economics, whether achievements, substantive freedoms or both, place their real value on the best use that can be made of them, which coincides with the use that is actually made (under the

[13] Alkire (2005, p. 127) stresses that "that operationalizing [the CA] is not a one-time thing. Some critics seem to be nostalgic for an approach that would cleanse the capability approach from all of the value choices and provide an intellectual breakthrough — like finding a cure for AIDS. If that is the case then researchers are competing teams who are trying to find the magic missing insight. But many of the residual value judgments in the capability approach will need to be made on the ground over and over again"

assumption of a rational agent[14]). This is the intuition behind revealed preference approximations. Since choice is the only observable event, and an agent able of making optimal choices is assumed, the actual selection represents the best selection and, therefore, all alternatives can be evaluated in terms of the latter. In this sense, the use value of the opportunity lies solely on the value of one element, the chosen one, which is the best one. Consequently, following this tradition, focusing on the chosen functioning vector is the equivalent to focusing on the capability set. This approach was briefly mentioned above in terms of 'refined functionings'. An alternative, also mentioned above, is focusing on achieved functionings but also include choosing as one valuable functioning.

The value of a capability set, however, does not necessarily have to coincide with the value of the best or chosen element. From a capability perspective, the presence of valuable non-taken up options can also be of importance. In other words, simply having opportunities is itself valuable. This means moving beyond outcomes and paying attention to the process through which they are brought about and recognizing that it is important in and of itself. Hence, the relevance of choosing itself as a valuable functioning is highlighted. As was illustrated above, there is a notorious difference in marrying someone by choice, presumably having at least the choice not to get married, and marrying someone by obligation, coercion or force. Accounting for these opportunities and other substantive freedoms, however, can prove rather challenging.

To recall, for evaluative purposes then the CA focuses either on realized functionings (i.e. the valued things a person is actually able to do or be or their lifestyles) or the capability set (i.e. the alternative combinations of doings and beings that are feasible for someone to achieve, or their real opportunities). Some exercises admit evaluation on both. Sen (1999) distinguishes two levels of importance: the foundational and the practical one. At the foundational one, as has been argued throughout this chapter, the capability perspective has proven its merits in contrast to the alternatives. This does not necessarily apply to the practical level. At this level, focusing exclusively on capabilities may not be warranted. Some capabilities may defy measurement more than others and attempts to capture them within a metric is likely to obscure them instead of illuminating them.

[14] Different characteristics have been attributed to the rational actor in economics. For this argument Sen (1999: 76) refers to two common assumptions: maximizing behavior and the absence of uncertainty.

In light of the challenge posed by the evaluation of capabilities, Sen (1999) has recognized the strong need for pragmatism for use of available data for the purposes of empirical exercises, whether practical evaluation or policy analysis. In this sense, practical compromises are admitted in evaluative exercises, observing the pragmatic nature of practical reason. Thus, three alternative practical approaches to operationalize the capability perspective have been suggested, to wit, the direct, the supplementary, and the indirect approach.

The direct approach is a fully-fletched way to include the concern with capabilities into the assessment of states. As such, it studies and compares directly vectors of functionings and capabilities. It has three variants: i) total comparison; ii) partial ranking; and, iii) distinguished capability comparison. Total comparison involves the ranking or ordering of all vectors compared with each other in terms of poverty (or inequality or any other subject matter of interest). This is the most ambitious variant and, as such, judged to be much too ambitious. Partial ranking, in turn, offers a less demanding alternative since it employs only a limited amount of functionings and capabilities to be used in interpersonal comparison. This raises the question of valuation and selection of the relevant vectors, which was addressed above. Finally, distinguished capability comparison refers to the selection of a specific capability of interest and the attention given exclusively to it. Longevity, employment, mobility, are some illustrations[15].

The supplementary approach advances a more conventional option for the assessment of states. It accepts the use of the income space for interpersonal comparisons but not exclusively. It supplements it by capability considerations, expanding thereby the informational base. This can be performed by focusing either on direct comparisons of functionings or on non-income instrumental variables that are expected to be related to capabilities. Some illustrations can be the presence of discrimination in voting rights, the access to basic services, etc. This means, using the distinguished capability comparison variant, described above, supplementarily.

The indirect approach can be located somewhere in between the direct and the supplementary approaches. This alternative also follows the conventional focus on income

[15] Although certainly incomplete, distinguished capability comparisons can prove rather useful for public policy analysis and evaluation. Since policies are based on a causal intuition, focusing on the outcomes of policy in terms of capabilities can prove to be a rather rewarding exercise (see Garcés 2018a, 2018b).

variables but adjusts them by dint of non-income information that influences the determination of capabilities. In this sense, household income can be adjusted downward by the presence of disabilities or upward by the presence of a good bill of health. As such, this approach can be regarded as capability-based equivalence scale. The advantages of this approach notwithstanding, it is not easier than the direct approach. Significant challenges such as the conversion rates that apply, the risk of confusing the unit of measurement with the cause of outcomes and the importance of recognizing the non-linear effect that income can have on people's quality of life ought to be adequately addressed (Sen, 1999).

Hence, this freedom-based perspective shows considerable catholicity and is not an all-or-nothing approach. The exact shape that the exercise may take depends both on the context and on the information available. Sen (1999, p. 85) asserts: "The foundational proposition of the importance of capabilities can go with various strategies of actual evaluation involving practical compromises", and then continues "It is this combination of foundational analysis and pragmatic use that gives the capability approach its extensive reach" (Sen, 1999, p. 86).

5.3. Under-theorization

It has been argued that the CA suffers from being theoretically underspecified. Robeyns (2008, p. 94) has been emphatic:

> The underspecified character of the capability approach requires that, before the capability approach can be applied for specific normative analyses, it has to be supplemented with additional theories. These theories include ontological theories about certain aspects of social and individual lives, and explanatory theories giving accounts of why states and processes are the way they are and how we should understand them. These supplementary theories also include normative accounts of the three conversion factors in the capability approach, and a normative theory of choice and personal responsibility.

Indeed, the capability approach is not a theory in the conventional sense of being able to provide explanation for social phenomena, let alone predictions. It does not explain poverty and neither does it explain development. Such theories would be helpful, however,

they are arguably dependent on an adequate elaboration on the ontological and epistemological implications of the CA. The expectation that an explanatory theory can complement the CA, in the positivist sense, may be misplaced if the CA is found not to allow for such complementarity. Indeed, this might be case when capabilities and agency are studied, because of the counterfactual nature of the former (Comim, 2008) and the subjective nature of the latter (Alkire, 2007).

Similarly, although it provides a normative account for the evaluative space it advances (functionings and capabilities) as well as for agency, to a certain extent, it lacks a normative account of some of its most basic elements such as choice and conversion factors, particularly social ones. These can be constraints as well as enablements for agency and the enjoyment of capabilities or the achievement of functionings. To a certain extent, this may also entail the hermeneutic apprehension of perceptions and subjectivities since different conversion factors may mean different things to different people.

Likewise, the important issue of the nature of the entities of interest (ontology) has not been given due attention. This seems to be particularly the case of the significant issue of the agent-structure dynamic.

To a certain extent, these are related issues and are rooted in the philosophy of science. Little, if anything, has been said about the CA and its implications for the latter or *vice versa*. Ontology has been the concern in the literature. Interestingly, however, within the CA's camp, instead of exploring what its ontology is, the discussion has been mainly been to show what it is not. In this sense, it has been convincingly argued that the CA does not spouse an individualist ontology (and methodological individualism in general) (Robeyns, 2005; 2008; 2017). This has been an important contribution, as it has shed light on a misconception regarding the CA's focus on individuals as the ultimate ethical unit of analysis.

There have been incipient efforts to address the ontological question. Martins (2006; 2007; 2009), for example, based on a critical realist analysis, suggests that the CA advances a social ontology. This proposal is certainly provocative as provides an alternative to positivism. It, however, still needs to be thoroughly elaborated in order assess its advantages and disadvantages. Particularly problematic are the ontological

commitments that critical realism makes, that the CA does not. Another alternative is pragmatism, which has been very loosely associated to the CA (Zimmermann, 2006), although nothing has been said about this at the level of the philosophy of science. Hence, much more work is necessary in order to provide an account that accommodates the capability approach's proposal.

Importantly, within under-theorization, the issue of agency looms large and has received relatively less attention. By placing people and their quality of life at the center of development, the CA has sought to provide an account of human beings and human action. Despite its contribution to the debate concerning agency, it has been suggested that the CA regards people mainly as choosers (Gasper 2002), remaining unspecified in sociological terms (Gangas 2016; Zimmermann 2006).

While these arguments hold much merit, they also seem to focus mostly on the first part of the older and grander notion adopted by the CA, i.e. acting and bringing about change. To be sure, the approach appears to privilege it over the second, i.e. judging those actions and changes as well as their underlying values and preferences. Whereas the first can be captured by choice, the second can be denoted by reason. The priority of choice is evidenced in the approach's regard of development as the 'enlargement of people's *choices'*. Presumably, this is partly due to the primacy of observables and objectivity in the field of economics, where much of the debate has taken place. The second part of agency's notion can be discerned from the attention to rationality. This can be illustrated by the CA's defining capabilities as all possible doings and beings that people value and have *reason* to value. This, in turn, brings in-principle unobservables to the fore. However, this emphasis on the second part of agency's notion has certainly not been fully consistent in Sen's work, let alone in the wider literature. This can go some way in explaining the association of capablitarian agents as mere choosers. Be that as it may, both components, choice and rationality, are part of the CA's notion of agency and ought to be treated as such.

As can be gathered from the above, accounting for the CA's agent deals with questions related to what human beings and their action are. That is, it touches upon ontological issues. Giving the two components their due within the CA seems to imply the incorporation of meaning and interpretation (rationality) alongside measurement and explanation (choice). Thus, fleshing out its notion of agency may have relevant

implications for the approach in terms of the philosophy of science. Taking on that enterprise is important intrinsically and instrumentally. On the one hand, in and of itself it is relevant to clarify the underpinnings of the approach. On the other hand, that clarification can guide better empirical exercises. As Sheppard (in Hardy 2016, p. 773), addressing another human-centered and practice-oriented discipline, states: "[i]nteresting as they may be, [philosophy of science] issues lack relevance or utility [...] unless they have practical utility, thus pushing [...] researchers to generate knowledge which is practically useful within 'the practice paradigm'."

Additionally, the issue of agency is compounded by Sen's seemingly dropping the rejection of freedom as control and its concomitant distinction between realized and instrumental agency success. Although not directly acknowledged by the literature, his differentiation had the benefit of accounting for people who have others choosing and reasoning for them, such as children, the elderly or people with mental disabilities, since their outcome could arguably fall within realized agency success. This would leave these capability-relevant groups unaccounted for. Personal or internal conversion factors would not encompass them since they seem to apply to individuals *qua* choosers, and these groups have surrogated their choices. The CA's adherence to the 'older and grander' notion of agency, as someone bringing about change and whose choices can be judged in terms of their own reasons or those of others (Sen 1999), seems to corroborate this lacuna.

This state of affairs underscores the importance and urgency of providing an account of the CA's notion of agency to assess its actual scope. On that basis, its limitations and shortcomings can be identified and a plausible way to address them can be proposed. Consequently, those are the issues with which this dissertation is concerned.

6. Conclusions

Development is a value-laden notion. It not only suggests the idea of change but of positive change. Theories, approaches and ideas about development matter because they point to what matters. At their most basic, they point to that which is worth changing and indicate the direction of change. That being so, these notions are not solely abstract undertakings and intellectual endeavors but intentional attempts to influence people and induce that change. This is evident in the translation of development research to practice by way of

development policy. The relevance of discussing development, thus, can hardly be overstated as people's lives are at stake.

By far, the dominant approach to development has been the one spawn from economics, to wit, economic growth. Although originally the idea of development seemed to include both the macro concern of economic prosperity and the micro interest in individual well-being, it has been the former that has received most of the attention, to the detriment of the latter. In fact, the attention to economic growth has often been argued as incorporating people's well-being. Focusing on consumption is believed to speak about human well-being since consumption enters the utility function, which signals one's level of happiness or satisfaction.

These two traditions, resourcism and utilitarianism, have been discussed, however briefly, in order to set the stage for the contribution made by the CA. Resourcism focuses exclusively on opulence and the command over resources. It is an important dimension of well-being in the sense that more resources can contribute to meeting more needs of higher levels of them. As such, however, it privileges the means over the ends of development. Utilitarianism, in turn, has the advantage of paying attention to ends, like pleasure and desire fulfilment. However, because it concentrates on a mental state, interpersonal comparisons can prove challenging, since people adapt to their circumstances. In both cases, they share the shortcoming of assuming that one indicator related to one dimension can speak for the whole of human experience.

The CA as a framework for the assessment of the states of individuals makes a considerable contribution to the literature on development and welfare. It introduces a bold critique to the conventional approach while recognizing it actual scope of application and incorporating it in its proposal. Apropos of utilitarianism, it recognizes that subjective well-being is an intrinsically important dimension of people's lives but rejects the notion of it being the only dimension of concern. In the case of resourcism, the framework acknowledges the importance of material well-being only as instrumental. In this sense, the CA is careful not throw the baby with the bath water.

The CA focuses on people and their quality of life. By so doing, it elaborates an account of human beings. Development's purpose, from this perspective, is the enlargement of people's freedoms (choices) and encompasses every dimension of an individual's life

(Haq, 2004). Thus, the questions at the core of this approach are 'what lives are individuals free to lead?' (Alkire &Deneulin, 2010b) and 'what lives have they chosen to lead?' (Robeyns, 2017). To give an answer, the Capability Approach augments the informational space of analysis to those aspects of life that make it worthwhile (Sen, 1999).

At the evaluative space are functionings and capabilities. While the former denotes the achieved doings and beings that one values and has reason to value, which are constitutive to a person's being, the latter refers to the combinations of possible functionings. They establish the move beyond economic variables and single figures (and dimensions) and into multidimensionality. This approach, however, does not understate the relevance of economic insights. To the contrary, it acknowledges it, but only as one of many dimensions of people's lives, having solely instrumental value (Anand & Sen, 1994).

The motivational aspects of the CA are well-being and agency. Whereas well-being indicates self-interest, agency encompasses the totality of one's motivations, self-regarding as well as other-regarding. As such, agency underlines human diversity as people can have multiple goals that they value and have reason to value. Thus, both functionings and capabilities can be evidenced in either motivational aspect. Further, although these aspects are interdependent they are also distinct and move in the same and in opposite directions.

Importantly, capabilitarian agency has also been defined in its 'older and grander' sense, consisting of two components: i) acting and bringing about change, and ii) judging those actions and changes as well as their underlying values and preferences. While the former is manifested in the focus on choice, the latter is captured by the much less attended issue of rationality.

Finally, the translation from resources or entitlements to functionings and capabilities is far from direct and to characterize the mediating elements the CA introduces 'conversion factors', which further highlight human diversity. These are personal as well as contextual (social and environmental) attributes that intervene in that translation. Different people in different contexts may require different quantities or qualities of resources to achieve similar outcomes.

Hence, the CA enlarges the informational base and provides a richer account of human beings in order to better tackle the issues with which development is concerned. Its advantages notwithstanding, it has also been subjected to criticisms. Arguably two of the most significant ones have been the issue of the relevant capabilities or functionings and the plausibility of empirical application. Regarding the selection of freedom or achievements, Sen has been emphatic in pointing out that the expectation of a definitive list is antithetical to the approach's notion of agency. Accordingly, the CA stresses that lists depend on the purposes of the exercise and of the people involved. It is people, as agents in charge of their destinies, that must decide on their priorities. Concerning how amenable the CA is for empirical exercises, Sen has recognized that the approach places a tall order on information. Therefore, it has admitted that certain exercises may require practical compromises and, for example, focus on functionings, the observed state, since capabilities entail counterfactuals that might be overly taxing to capture.

Consequently, the CA breaks with the convention and proposes an alternative that better captures human experience. It is not surprising that it has become a fertile ground for scholars and practitioner alike. Perhaps the best illustration is the increasingly influential Human Development Reports produced by the United Nations Development Program. Indeed, an excited body of work dedicated to advance the approach has grown and the fruits in policy making are starting to show. The recent great efforts dedicated to multidimensional poverty indicators is but one example of this. It also exposes a clear empirical orientation in these efforts. This is to be expected. On the one hand, it reflects the preference of economics, the framework's putative father. On the other, as mentioned above, development is about change by nature and so are its research and practice. If the usual and strict demands of funding for tangible results, in either case, are factored in, it is understandable that the literature reflects this situation.

Regarding the third critique, and the main concern of this dissertation, namely under-theorization, it has been pointed out that the CA needs complementary theories. This emphasizes the point that the CA is a framework and requires normative, explanatory and ontological theorization. Within this broad critique, the notion of agency looms particularly large. Capabilitarian agency has been criticized as rendering people choosers, wanting in sociological terms. The merits of this critique notwithstanding, it seems to place too much weight on the first component of the notion: choice, in detriment to the

second component: rationality. Hence, an adequate elaboration of the CA's agency, fleshing out both elements, seems required.

The notion of agency within the approach, however, has not been static. A most relevant changes has been the abandonment of the distinction between instrumental agency success and realized agency success, held until 1992 concomitantly with the rejection of regarding freedom as control. This differentiation had the benefit of providing an account of people who have others choosing and reasoning for them, since they could fall within realized agency success. Nonetheless, dropping this distinction and rejection, respectively, suggests that these groups are left unaccounted for. This apparent void in the CA's notion of agency warrants adequate attention.

Accounting for human beings and their action entails an ontological discussion. In the case of the CA, given its ontological under-theorization, such undertaking has the added benefit of shedding light on an issue that, despite its conceptual as well as empirical relevance, has received relatively little scrutiny thus far.

Human agency is of the utmost importance for development and the relevance of providing an adequate account can hardly be overstated. Policies (tacitly or explicitly) make assumptions about humans and their behavior, whether as their ends or as their means. If the latter do not obtain, interventions inspired on them may fail. In one way or another, people's lives and quality of life are at stake. In a context of scarce resources, moreover, failure is increasingly unacceptable.

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Chapter 2
The reasoning agent: agency in the capability approach and some implications for development research and practice[16]
Capítulo 2
El agente razonante: agencia en el enfoque de capacidades y algunas implicaciones para la investigación y la práctica del desarrollo

Abstract

Amartya Sen's capability approach (CA) is a freedom-centered and agency-oriented framework to the assessment of individual and social states. Indeed, it regards agency as having intrinsic, instrumental and constructive importance. Thus, there is a growing literature exploring how to empirically capture agency. However, relatively less has been said about what the CA agency entails on its own terms. That discussion hinges on two themes: rationality and freedom. Contrary to the dominant approach, rational choice theory, which proposes a selfish, calculative, atomistic chooser, the CA proposes a multi-motivated, multidimensional, plural, reflective chooser. That is, instead of a rational, the CA suggests a reasoning agent. Accounting for such an agent has important implications for the conduct of inquiry, including the philosophy of science. They might be better tackled if the latter is given its due.

Key words: capability, agency, rationality, freedom, reasoning

Resumen

El enfoque de capacidades (EC) es un marco centrado en la libertad y orientado hacia la agencia para la evaluación de estados individuales y sociales. Efectivamente, considera que la agencia tiene importancia intrínseca, instrumental y constructiva. Así, hay una creciente literatura que explora cómo capturar la agencia empíricamente. Sin embargo, relativamente menos se ha dicho sobre lo que la agencia del EC implica en sus propios términos. Esa discusión involucra dos temas: la racionalidad y la libertad. Contrario al enfoque dominante, la teoría de la elección racional, que propone a un elector egoísta, calculador y atomista, el EC propone un elector con múltiples motivaciones,

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multidimensional, plural y reflexivo. Es decir, en lugar de uno racional, el EC sugiere un agente razonante. Estudiar a ese agente tiene importantes implicaciones para la investigación, incluida la filosofía de la ciencias. Aquellas pueden enfrentarse de mejor manera si esta se aborda debidamente.

Palabras clave: capacidad, agencia, racionalidad, libertad, razonamiento

1. Introduction

Amartya Sen's Capability Approach[17] (CA) provides a framework with which to assess social states. Challenging the conventional approach, focusing on pecuniary variables, the CA places people and their lives at the locus of attention. The most relevant questions it seeks to answer are *i)* what are people free to do and be? (Alkire & Deneulin 2010), and *ii)* what have people chosen to do and be? (Robeyns 2017).

The CA makes, at least, three momentous moves. First, it moves the locus of attention from the means (opulence) to the ends of development (people and their quality of life). To do so, it expands the informational base of inquiry to those aspects that make life worthwhile. The focus is on *functionings* or doings and beings that people value and have reason to value and *capabilities,* a vector of all possible functionings. While the former stresses achievement, the latter emphasizes effective opportunity or freedom (Sen 1999a).

Second, by so doing, it moves from a unidimensional approach that uses a single indicator (a measure of opulence) to a multidimensional one seeking to encompass those intrinsically valuable dimensions of life. This is related to the motivation aspects expressed by *wellbeing* (own personal welfare), and *agency* (self-regarding as well other-regarding goals) (Sen 1999a). Well-being and agency establish a first turn towards human diversity. There are multiple valuable doings and beings and life-styles from which people could choose, according to their personal preferences. Therefore, functionings and capabilities can manifest themselves in both well-being and agency.

Third, and partly because of the above, the CA moves from a notion of humans as uniform to a notion of them being diverse by its stress on conversion factors, *i.e.,* what mediates the translation from resources and entitlements into capabilities and functionings. They reflect the view of humans as complex beings, consisting of personal characteristics and affected by social and environmental ones. Conversion factors establish a second turn towards human diversity. Different people in different contexts may require different quantities or qualities of resources to achieve similar outcomes.

[17] This paper deals with the *capability* approach (emphasis on the singular), *i.e.,* Amartya Sen's contribution. Another important contribution to the human development literature is the *capabilities* approach (emphasis on the plural) proposed by Martha Nussbaum (see e.g. 2000, 2003, 2011). Although they have much in common, they also diverge in some key aspects, one of which is the notion of agency.

Because of its contributions, the CA has been considered as quintessentially policy oriented (Gasper 2007). There is a growing literature employing the framework in order to inspire policy or to evaluate it. One important aspect that has received increased attention is that of agency. This is because of its intrinsic value, it is valuable in and of itself, but also because of its instrumental one, as the exercise of agency makes people better able to pull themselves by the bootstraps. Thus, several accounts have been used empirically attempting to capture it, *inter alia:* proxy measures of empowerment (Alsop & Heinsohn 2005); global or multidimensional approaches (Narayan & Petesch 2007); accounts of effective power and control (Alsop *et al.* 2006), and efficacy (Bandura 1995); the study of autonomy (Chirkov *et al.* 2003) and ability (illustrated by agency indicators related to poverty [Alkire 2009]). While the jury is still out on which of these accounts does more justice to the CA, this state of affairs raises an important issue: if different accounts coexist, it is presumably because they capture something distinct; but if, at the same time, they are all inspired by the CA, they should capture something similar as well.

Interestingly, much less attention has been given to the exploration of the CA's notion of agency itself, in its own terms. In order to contribute to that discussion and enrich empirical efforts, it seems warranted to address this logically prior issue and try to answer the question «what does the capabilitarian agent look like?».

To do so, the argument is structured as follows. According Sen's strategy, the second section presents the dominant approach, namely, rational choice and the rational agent. The third section elaborates on the CA's redefinition of rationality, exposing its fundamental challenge to the convention. In the fourth section, freedom is addressed *vis-à-vis* rationality, achievement, and conversion factors in order to bring its dynamics with agency to the forefront. The penultimate section presents briefly a discussion of the import of this discussion for the philosophy of science and *vice versa*. The final section concludes.

2. The rational choice approach and agency

A scrutiny of agency entails a complex exercise since it not only requires accounting for human action but doing so in respect to certain ends (Alkire 2009, Hempel 1962). In this sense, the dominant approach has explained behavior in terms of its rationality, and states that a person acts rationally if their actions are coherent with their aims, *i.e.,* if they constitute means to those ends (Nida-Rümelin 1997). Put otherwise, an action is rational

to the extent it enables the achievement of the agent's goals (Hempel 1962). Although originated in economics, this framework —*i.e.,* rational choice— has proven so pervasive that it rules over a growing number of social science fields (Wittek *et al.* 2013, Nida-Rümelin 1997). Consequently, this section addresses what are arguably the defining elements of rational choice: rationality, observability, and individualism.

2.1. Rational choice theory (RCT) and the rational agent

As its very name suggests, for RCT, human conduct is explained by *choice* and the latter is assumed to be *rational.* This assumption exposes the value-laden aspect of this theory, going beyond mere explanation. As Elster (1986, p. 1) put it, «the theory of rational choice is, before it is anything else, a normative theory. It [tells] us what we ought to do in order to achieve our aims as well as possible. It does not tell us what our aims ought to be». That is, it advances that human action is and ought to be rational; not only that, but the standard approach[18], of interest for this argument, assumes full rationality (Camerer *et al.*2003).

What does full rationality entail? Although there is no consensus regarding what constitutes full rationality (Wittek *et al.* 2013), according to Camerer *et al.* (2003), most economists would agree on three components: *i)* people have well-defined preferences and their decisions seek to maximize them, this means that their preferences are coherent or that they observe the principles of reflexivity, completeness, transitivity, and continuity (Graziano 2013); *ii)* those preferences reflect the true costs and benefits of all available options, to the best of the person's knowledge; *iii)* in case of uncertainty, people have well-informed beliefs about how it will resolve itself and are capable of updating their beliefs in light of new information factoring it in their probabilistic assessments[19].

Two elements are worth stressing: self-interest and instrumental rationality[20]. First, «rational choice consists of acting to maximize personal gain, *i.e.,* the option that allows

[18] This paper focuses on the standard RCT model as it is best known and most widely used. However, a variety of versions of have spawn since its conception. For a discussion, see Wittek *et al.* (2013).
[19] Interestingly, this is very resonant of Becker's (1976, p. 14) classic depiction of RCT: «All human behavior can be viewed as involving participants who (1) maximize their utility, (2) form a stable set of preferences and (3) accumulate an optimal amount of information and other inputs in a variety of markets».
[20] These elements constitute what has been called «practical economic rationality» against which alternatives have been suggested. A promising contribution is «practical ethical rationality» based on neuroethics. For a discussion, see Lozano (2013, 2017).

the realization of the highest level of satisfaction for the agent» (Graziano 2013, p. 3). Second, rationality is taken to be instrumental since it is concerned with the most efficient way to maximize utility (Cruickshank 2001) or a means-ends decisions making process (Ratcliff 2001). Hence, the rational agent is selfish and calculative[21].

2.2. Preferences and revealed preference theory (RPT)

For RCT preferences (such as altruism) are considered exogenous and predicates about rationality do not offer an account of them («de gustibus non est disputandum») (Archer & Tritter 2001, Elster 1989). Subjective orderings of preferences are the result of extra-economic factors and are, therefore, regarded only as data. Additionally, preferences are considered stable and when change is admitted, it is not factored in economic theory and is treated as exogenous instead (Maletta 2010). Individuals, thus, become black boxes in this regard.

Accordingly, the locus of attention is placed on choice, not on preference. This is made possible by revealed preference theory, an approach to explain consumer behavior. Although there have been a few versions, arguably its most important assumptions are: *i)* rationality, *i.e.,* the consumer chooses a bundle with more of a good than a bundle with less; *ii)* consistency, *i.e.,* if the consumer selects bundle A when B is available, A will be consistently selected over B; *iii)* transitivity, *i.e.,* if the consumer prefers A to B and B to C, then they prefer A to C (Omoniyi *et al.* 2015).

The revealed preference axiom can summarize the approach. In its most basic (or weak) form, it states: if the consumer selects bundle X^0 at prices P^0 even though X^1 is available and affordable, bundle X^0 will be selected over X^1 unless X^0 is not affordable (Hands 2013).

What is of interest in here is the fact that RPT focuses exclusively on observables. By basing choice solely on quantities of goods and prices, it is not necessary to introduce «utility» or «preference». In fact, advancing a positivist epistemology, ridding the theory of terms related to unobservable mental states such as these was the whole purpose of this project[22] (Hands 2013). Robbins (1938, p. 636) put it succinctly: «Every mind is

[21] Certainly, RCT is a tree with several branches, some of them relaxing these assumptions to different extents (see Wittek *et al.* 2013). Nonetheless, for present purposes, the full rationality model is used as it is still the most widely used.

[22] «One of the goals of the ordinal revolution [...] was to move away from the hedonistic and cardinal notions of utility that the first generation of neoclassical economists had inherited from utilitarianism,

inscrutable to every other mind and no common denominator of feelings is possible». The focus on objectivity is necessary for the positivist template since its main contribution: generalization, external validity or prediction, relies on it.

Agency, however, inescapably entails both subjective and objective aspects (Archer & Tritter 2001). This is because people act according to reasons and meanings (the subjective) under certain circumstances (the objective). The answer provided by the dominant approach is to treat reasons as preferences and, since «*de gustibus non est disputandum*», disregard them, focusing instead on the cost-benefit analysis entailed by the maximization of those subjectively defined ends under a given set of limitations and enablements, *i.e.,* instrumental rationality, which is assumed to be objectively observed in choice.

Consequently, with the help of RPT, RCT adheres to the positivist pursuit for objectivity, turning the rational agents into selfish, calculative choosers.

2.3. Methodological Individualism

As the discussion has suggested, RCT explains human behavior at the level of the individual. This is because RCT is «[...] the most vital form of explicit methodological individualism in contemporary social science» (Udehn 2001, p. 288). Methodological individualism is a doctrine that includes *inter alia,* ontological and explanatory individualism (Robeyns 2017). Ontological individualism claims that only individuals, their characteristics and properties exist; and that, consequently, society and its properties can be reduced to them (Robeyns 2017). This leads to the epistemologically individualistic claim that «all social phenomena are to be explained wholly and exclusively in terms of individuals and their properties» (Bhargava 1992, p. 19).

Put differently, for RCT the structure has neither properties of its own nor causal powers and, thus, is reducible to the agent. An important implication is that what ever features the structure may have at one time, characterized as constraints or enablements in the decision-making process of the agent, are the product of the individuals, at that same time.

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and to move in the direction of the type of observable empirical evidence-objective, not introspective, evidence-consistent with positivist philosophical ideas of the day [...]. The early ordinalists has eliminated hedonism and cardinal utility, but still employed terms like “preference” and “utility”; Samuelson’s goal was to eliminate such theoretical terms all together» (Hands 2013, p. 1083).

That is, there is synchronicity (Archer & Tritter 2001). There is no historical explanation for current choices as there are no explanations for how the latter may affect future ones. In brief, the individual is the independent variable, never the dependent one (Cruickshank 2001). In this sense, for rational choice, the rational agent is a self-interested, calculative, atomistic chooser.

Although born in economics, RCT has proven to be quite influential in social science. This is no coincidence. From the start, and conforming to the positivist expectation of uncovering universal laws (or law-like generalizations), RCT claimed to be applicable beyond economic behavior. Gary Becker (1976, p. 8) himself declared: «I have come to the position that the economic approach is a comprehensive one that is applicable to all human behavior».

Against this backdrop, the Capability Approach offers an alternative, regarding agency instead «[...] in its older —and "grander"— sense as someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well» (Sen 1999a, p. 19). As such, it has intrinsic, instrumental and constructive value (Crocker & Robeyns 2010). In order to better apprehend what this entails for the CA itself and for its empirical applications, two elements are of particular interest from this conception, to wit, freedom and achievement, entailed in acting to generate an outcome, as well as reason and rationality, implied in the judgment of that action and its motivations. To facilitate the narrative, the latter is addressed first in the next section and the former in the subsequent one.

3. The CA and Rationality

The CA opposes explicitly RCT's notion of rationality and, hence, of agency. Sen (2002, p. 4) defines rationality as «subjecting one's choices —of actions as well as of objectives, values and priorities— to reasoned scrutiny». Furthermore, and significantly, in his later work Sen (2009, p. 180, emphasis in the original) specifies: «[...] rationality is primarily a matter of basing —explicitly or by implication— our choices on reasoning that we can reflectively *sustain,* and it demands that our choices, as well as our actions and objectives, values and priorities, can survive our own seriously undertaken critical scrutiny». Consequently, this section addresses how this redefinition of rationality challenges the

convention and what it means for the study of agency.

3.1. Rationality as reasoning

Discussing the notion of rationality advanced by the rational choice framework, Sen (2002, p. 4) has emphatically stated:

> The broad reach [of reason] entails the rejection of some widely used but narrowly formulaic views of rationality: for example, that rationality must require following a set of a priori «conditions of internal consistency of choice» or «axioms of expected utility maximization», or that rationality demands the relentless maximization of «self-interest» to the exclusion of other reasons for choice.

In this sense, the distancing is evident in terms of motivation, the evaluative space, and the unit of analysis. Regarding motivations, the CA goes beyond the egoist agent. The CA recognizes that there are a variety of motives prompting choice and action, not only self-interest. In this sense, Sen (1977) differentiates between sympathy and commitment. Sympathy denotes a state in which someone's well being is dependent on somebody else's welfare, as when a person feels discomfort due to another's flu (coughing, or sneezing). Commitment refers to choices that foreseeably lead to lower levels of personal welfare when there are options that lead to increases. In its more inclusive sense, commitment encompasses choices and actions that are carried out with anticipated increases in well-being but that not being the reason for them, *e.g.,* because it is the «right thing to do» (Sen 2002). As such, commitment «[...] drives a wedge between personal choice and personal welfare, and much of traditional economic theory relies on the identity of the two» (Sen 1977, p. 329). Therefore, sympathetic choices and actions may be considered as self-regarding. However, commitment-based behavior cannot, and much of human experience falls under the latter.

More broadly, there may be a plurality of sustainable reasons for a choice[23]. Different people may aim for the same outcome for different reasons. Someone may want a promotion for the wage increase, another for the reputation, another still for the ability to have a greater impact. Similarly, the same person can make the same choice at different

[23] «The possibility of plurality of sustainable reasons is not only important in giving rationality its due, it also distances the idea of rational choice from its putative role as a simple predictor of actual choice, as it has been widely used in mainstream economics» (Sen 2009, p. 183).

times with different motivations each time. An individual may donate to charity to help a cause they believe in at one time, at another they may do so to get a tax break and at another out of mindless habit. Assuming consistency based solely on choice, therefore, would be misleading. Self-interest is only one motivation, and is captured by «well-being» in the CA. Equating rationality only with self-seeking egoists is regarding people as rational fools (Sen 1977). This framework, therefore, recognizes a plurality of motivations and agency encompasses the totality of them.

Concerning the evaluative space, the CA takes issue with the one-dimensional exclusive focus on utility and its maximization. This is related to self-interest but also distinct. The issue here is arguably best illustrated using the term «preferences». For rational choice, preferences do not speak for themselves; they do so via choice. What is chosen is taken to be what is preferred. Moreover, an identification has been drawn between what is preferred or chosen and what makes one better off (Sen 1977). However, an exclusive focus on utility leaves out much of human experience. According to the CA, that tradition is restrictive in at least two ways: *i)* it completely disregards freedom and observes achievement only, and *ii)* it disregards all other achievements that are not captured by this mental state (Sen 1992).

At most, this account can be associated with well-being in the CA, and only partially. The CA recognizes the scope and limitations of utility-based assessment; among the most relevant shortcomings are adaptive preferences, denoting that people adjust their mental states to their circumstances, the difficulty in interpersonal comparisons as well as in distributional analyses, and the assumption that one indicator can account for the whole of human experience (Sen 1999a, 1992, 1979). Hence, it acknowledges subjective well-being as solely one dimension among many others (Sen 1992). The CA increases the informational base to incorporate diverse doings and beings regarded as important in and of themselves and not just because they produce utility or to the extent that they yield utility (Sen 1992). What is more, beyond achievement, the CA emphasizes the relevance of capability or well-being freedom, which is also multidimensional. Therefore, the CA scrutinizes more than just choice.

3.2. Rationality and choice

If, however, agency can only be accounted for in light of goals and aims (Alkire 2009), and these can be of various kinds (self-regarding, and other-regarding), as well as multidimensional (in functionings, and capabilities alike), then the CA deems relevant to expand the informational base. This means analyzing preferences and that entails opening the rational choice agent's black box.

Individuals, thus, choose to advance their considered aims, bringing thereby the change they seek in the world, after having discriminated between different reflected upon valuable options. They use sustainable reasoning not only to pursue their objectives but also to scrutinize those objectives and values themselves (Sen 2002). Importantly, this is a call for that scrutiny in others and, crucially, in the self (Sen 2009). Sen (2002, p. 36) asserts:

> A person is not only an entity that can enjoy one's own consumption, experience appreciate one's welfare, and have one's goals, but also an entity that can examine one's values and objectives and choose in the light of those values and objectives. Our choices need not relentlessly follow our experiences of consumption or welfare, or simply translate perceived goals into action. We can ask what we want to do and how, and in that context also examine what we should want and how. We might or might not be much moved by moral concerns or by social reasons, but neither are we prohibited from entertaining these questions, in shaping our values and if necessary revising our objectives in that light.

Firstly, when it comes to the preferred option, the choice made is to be assessed against the reasons behind it. Whether functionings or capabilities, the CA stresses that these are the doings and beings or combinations thereof, respectively, that one values and has reason to value. This emphasis highlights the importance that not just any type of life deemed valuable is legitimate. There may be aims lacking justifiable reasons (Sen 2009). One may value to take the law into one's own hands, seeking violent vengeance, for instance. This underlines the importance of *sustainability* of reasoning[24].

[24] «This is not, of course, the same thing as demanding that every time we choose something, we must undertake an extensive critical scrutiny – life would be intolerable if rational behaviour were to demand that. But it can be argued that a choice would count as rational only if it would be sustainable *had* a reasoned critical scrutiny been undertaken. When the reasons for a particular choice are established in

Furthermore, there may be choices answering to preferences questioned by the individual themselves. That is, there are preferences for one's preferences, which implies reasons for one's reasons. A smoker may choose to smoke but do so reluctantly because they know it to be unhealthy (Sen 2002). The individual has a second order preference opposed to their first order preference. This insight contributes to accounting for the imposition of self-restraint such as going on a diet or setting the alarm clock or any other mechanisms that stop one from acting out of passion, by impulse or on a whim.

Preferences denote what people value and scrutinizing them exposes their values. Values, in turn, are related to people's morality. In order to expose the latter, the former need to be examined. Sen (1977) has suggested that rankings of preferences rankings can prove useful for this undertaking. This meta-ranking, he argues, allows people to express their moral judgments in terms of the preferences they would have preferred to have. In this sense, this tool «[…] assists the reasoning which involves considering the merits of having different types of preferences (or of acting as if one had them)» (Sen 1977, p. 341).

Secondly, with respect to the alternatives, scrutiny of the options not taken is significant because bundles are not necessarily made equal. Although individuals may end up making the same choice, their motivations might be quite different. Although this issue is developed further in the next section (regarding freedom), suffice it to say here that options can be meaningful and meaningless. The exercise of reason in the first case is certainly distinguishable from that in the latter.

Thirdly, preferences and values depend on the circumstances of the individual (Sen 2002). An important issue for the CA is adaptive preferences, which refers to the adjustments people make in order to better cope with the situation in which they find themselves. In situations of disadvantage, as a mechanism of self-protection from frustrations and depression, disenfranchised people adapt their aspirations, aims and values to what seems realistically feasible, finding satisfaction in small gestures and appreciating handouts (Sen 1992), which have questionable reason to value:

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our mind through experience or habit formation, we may often choose reasonably enough without sweating over the rationality of every decision» (Sen 2009, p. 181, emphasis in the original).

> Deprived groups may be habituated to inequality, may be unaware of possibilities of social change, may be hopeless about upliftment of objective circumstances of misery, may be resigned to fate, and may well be willing to accept the legitimacy of the established order (Sen 1990a, p. 127).

More generally, this stresses the CA's argument that the doings and beings one values and has reason to value, and the combinations thereof, depend on conversion factors. People's preferences depend on their personal characteristics as well as those of their context, *i.e.,* social and environmental features. In order to inquire into preferences and identify their reasons, the individual's physical and mental attributes (*e.g.,* years of schooling, proneness to illness, self- esteem, etc.), the traits of the society in which they live (*e.g.,* hierarchical, patriarchal, theocratic, etc.) and the traits of their environment (*e.g.,* amount of rainfall, likelihood of draught, distance to basic services, etc.) have to be factored in.

3.3. Rationality and reasonableness

The changes one seeks, nonetheless, usually are not expected to ensue in a vacuum. When the social context is involved, preferences, choices and actions that have survived one's critical examination may not suffice. Such situations demand to move from the requirements of rationality to the demands of reasonableness (Sen 2009). This means incorporating the perspectives and considerations of others, of what is regarded as reasonable behavior, since they play a part in the scrutiny to which one's actions and choices can be sensibly subjected.

The assessment of reasonableness can take different forms. Based on Scanlon's (1998) proposal that, at its most basic, what is right and wrong is what could be justified to others in such a way that, if adequately motivated, they could not reasonably reject, three possible alternatives have attracted special attention: the contractarian view, the cooperative perspective, and the duty of power (Sen 2009). Contractarian reasoning consists on agreeing on a set of principles on the basis of symmetry and is illustrated by Rawls' «original position» in which all members of a society are behind a «veil of ignorance», which equalizes them as no one knows their actual position in society and ought to accord principles, for reasonable conduct in this case, *a priori*. The mutual benefits of the cooperative perspective suggest the engagement of all members of society in an exchange where each can advance their own advantage according to their own notion of the good.

As such, at best is based on the notion of reciprocity, at worst, in *quid pro quo*. Finally, the duties of power alternative propose that having effective power to act justly entails an obligation to do so. It is self-initiated and unidirectional as it is prompted by the agent with no retribution and expectation thereof.

These procedures aim at «impartial evaluation», which Sen (2009) suggests can provide a notion of objectivity with some plausibility for moral and political philosophy. Resting on his proposal to reconsider objectivity for practical assessments, Sen (1993b) recognizes that the same phenomenon is observed differently by different people *because of their position*. Should people be able to observe the phenomenon from the same position, he argues, they would make the same observation. Impartial evaluation, in this sense, entails two elements of non-subjectivity: the comprehension and communication on an objective basis, and objective acceptability. The former alludes to people's claims being sufficiently outside of personal subjectivity so that others can apprehend them; the latter indicates that people can debate the correctness of each other's claims (Sen 2009). Therefore, in order to assess one's behavior in the social context impartially, individual introspection and self-examination need to be complemented by other's inquiry; that is, public reasoned scrutiny is necessary for evaluations with some ethical objectivity.

3.4. Reasoning and agency

Hence, for the CA, the agent behaves rationally when they choose according to their aims after having critically scrutinized them and derived sustainable reasons for them. This examination leads to, at least, three significant insights: *i)* choice can only be assessed in terms of preferences, thus, «*de gustibus est disputandum*», including the (second order) preferences for (first order) preferences or reason for reasons; *ii)* scrutiny of choices and preferences includes the options not selected, and *iii)* this inquiry does not regard the individual as separated from their social context, their historical background, and their geographical environment but as dependent on it. To different extents, these insights are not only an invitation but a demand for the inclusion of unobservables, escaping thereby the positivist straight jacket. As Sen (1977, pp. 339-340) states, «once we give up the assumption that observing choices is the only source of data on welfare, a whole new world opens up, liberating us from the informational shackles of the traditional approach».

In this sense, the CA makes a move from a focus on «rationality» to a focus on «reason»[25]. As a result, it regards agency in quite different terms. Agency is about bringing about change *and* judging achievements. This section has focused particularly on the latter component. It has highlighted that the judging entails questioning oneself, whether or not it can also be made by others. There is an element of not only subjectivity but, more importantly, *reflexivity* in the study of agency. That means a move from the exclusive reliance on measurement to the inclusion of meaning.

4. The CA and Freedom

Freedom takes central stage for Sen's capability approach. As such, it is closely related to other important categories such as agency. For the CA, agency and freedom are intertwined. Indeed, Sen (1999a) has called the approach freedom-centered or freedom-based (Sen 1992) and agency-oriented (Sen 1999a). Likewise, freedom is interwoven with rationality, understood as the «[…] use of reasoning to understand and assess goals and values, and it also involves the use of these goals and values to make systematic choices» (Sen 2002, p. 46). In this section, the import of freedom for agency is discussed by addressing the complex dynamics between freedom, rationality, achievements, and conversion factors.

4.1. Freedom and rationality

From this perspective, rationality and freedom are interdependent. According to Sen (2002), considering rationality as the scrutiny of one's choices, aims and values, denotes that rationality is dependent on freedom in two senses: first, options must be available to exercise reason in order to choose; in slavery there are no choices to be made and reason cannot be exercised; second, in the presence of multiple options, rationality has to be able to accommodate the variety of reasons and preferences supporting a choice. This is central to the idea of freedom of thought.

There is arguably a third way in which rationality is dependent on freedom. Each effective opportunity to choose the doings and beings we value and have reason to value is an occasion to act rationally, *i.e.,* to subject preferences to reasoned scrutiny. There is a

[25] «This approach is based on the idea of a link between what could be rational for us to choose and what we have reason to choose» (Sen 2009, p. 180).

learning process in choosing that enables exercising one's reasoning muscles. Whether one achieves what one values or not, one gains information and experience from choices, which can be useful in order to make future choices better. Therefore, more freedom can lead to better reasoning and, thus, more rationality. This suggests that one's reasoned scrutiny can be performed more or less rigorously, depending on different considerations. Three inferences can be reached from the above: *i)* rationality is a matter of degree, not an all or nothing quality; *ii)* rationality is inherently plural, and *iii)* rationality is subject to different factors.

At the same time, freedom is dependent on rationality. This is related to the discussion formulated above. An account of freedom requires some notion of people's preferences and the reasons for those preferences. Nevertheless, freedom is often elaborated independently of values, preferences and reasons. In this sense, «freedom must depend on reasoned assessment of having different options» (Sen 2002, p. 5). This applies for both opportunity freedom and process freedom. While opportunity freedom refers to the effective choices that a person has to lead a life that they value and have reasons to value, process freedom denotes the conditions underlying those opportunities (Sen 1999a). Both perspectives of freedom are relevant and are related to each other. To clarify the difference, Sen (1997) introduces the distinction between «culmination outcomes» and «comprehensive outcomes». The former is concerned with outcomes only; the latter, in addition to outcomes, concentrates on the process leading them. The difference is illustrated in a politician seeking only to win an election and one seeking to win it fairly (Sen 2009, 2002). The following discussion, however, focuses on opportunity freedoms, unless otherwise stated, due to its clearer relation to agency.

4.2. Freedom and achievement

Freedom is at the heart of the approach, so much so that Sen (1999a) defined development as freedom and placed it at the core of the idea of justice (Sen 2009, 1990c). It is regarded as the effective opportunity people have to lead the lives they value and have reason to value. As such, freedom is intrinsically important, in addition to functionings. The focus on the former is significant because the alternative, paying attention to achievements exclusively, is tantamount to privileging outcomes to the detriment of the how they come about.

The intrinsic value of freedom challenges the process of conventional evaluations of states. Should freedom be only instrumentally important, for the achievements it can lead to, it would be appropriate to make assessments in terms of the latter; that is, in terms of the choice made (Sen 1992). The value of the opportunity, thus, would rest on the value given to one element of the set: the chosen option, assumed to be the best option. By so doing, the value of the capability set is effectively obscured since it is judged in terms of the functioning chosen. Accordingly, the elimination of all other doings and beings from the vector of possibilities entails no real disadvantage as long as the chosen option remains since, ultimately, is the only one that matters (Sen 1992).

There can also be a close relationship between freedom and achievement. Indeed, choosing is an important achievement. «"[C]hoosing" itself can be seen as a valuable functioning, and having an x when there is no alternative may be sensibly distinguished from choosing x when substantial alternatives exist» (Sen 1999a, p. 76). Also, it is possible to represent functionings in such a way as to reflect the options available. This possibility is illustrated by «fasting», which not only entails starving but starving when having the choice of not doing so. Sen (1985, 1988) refers to this functioning as «refined».

The relevance of freedom should not displace that of achievements in one additional and important sense. For this discussion, it is crucial to assess the choices, together with the bundle of options, because such an exercise says something about the scrutiny performed. Sen (2002) has briefly hinted towards the fallibility of rationality. The fact that one subjects one's actions and preferences to critical analysis does not automatically mean that the result will be optimal. One's reasoning can be biased or restricted, leading to deception, misconception, and suboptimal results, which can lead to unexpected or undesirable consequences. In other words, a limited rationality can translate into a limited agency, since one's choices may generate an undesired change or no change at all. To be sure, it could also generate «overoptimal» results due to sheer luck, but it is still a case of unintended consequences and, as such, it is still a case of limited agency. Looking at both elements, capabilities and functionings, as well as preferences, therefore, can be helpful to expose the type and degree of rationality at work.

4.3. Rationality and achievement and conversion factors

It was argued at the start of this section that the interdependence between rationality and freedom leads to three inferences about rationality, to wit, that it is a matter of degree, plural and that it depends on certain factors. In this sense, functionings can be some of the most relevant. Given that achievements are constitutive to a person's being (Sen 1992; 1990b), they can affect the reasoned scrutiny of one's choices, actions and values. The level of education, for example, is likely to be associated with important competences such as analytical and critical thinking as well as other cognitive abilities. Significantly, the type of this education is also important since the critical analysis to which one can subject one's choices and preferences can also differ. The same applies for other functionings such as health, employment, or self-esteem. It seems sensible to expect it to be easier to dedicate time and effort to analyze oneself if one does not have to worry about their survival or that of their loved ones, can afford the basic commodities and does not have to deal with depression, respectively. Hence, rationality is dependent on achievements.

Achievements, in turn, are also dependent on rationality. This relationship is perhaps more evident but warrants explicit mention. There may be different ways to achieve reflected upon valuable doings and beings. Some may be more efficient, other more legitimate, etc. Accordingly, how achievements can be reached may depend, *inter alia,* on the rigorousness of the scrutiny performed over one's choices and reasons.

Related to this discussion is the dynamic between rationality and conversion factors. Of particular interest are social ones: on the one hand, for example, they can constrain or enable rationality by making information, education or participation accessible or not to different people; on the other hand, social attributes can affect rationality in the sense of suggesting what reasoned scrutiny might entail; for instance, several communities the world over have increased their call for the inclusion of nature as part of the «development» agenda. For them, some goals may not be valuable after reflection (*e.g.,* increasing economic growth without care for the environment), which for other communities may seem acceptable. Accordingly, conversion factors can highlight the plural nature of rationality and how the latter depends on the former. Such plurality needs to be underlined, as Sen (2009, p. 195) has admitted: «Rationality is in fact a rather permissive discipline, which demands the test of reasoning, but allows reasoned self-

scrutiny to take quite different forms, without necessarily imposing any great uniformity of criteria».

In discussing social identity, the influence other people may have on a person's self-knowledge has been highlighted. Social identities are denoted by the different memberships that people may have in different groups. Importantly, Sen seems to assume *active* memberships; *i.e.,* agents choosing to belong to a group deliberately, not just happening to be a part of a group as a result of the pursuit of their interests (Teschl & Derobert 2008). This rejects communitarian accounts that see human beings as embedded in social groups and who cannot understand themselves in absence of their relations to others. Thus, Sen refutes the notion that society can have a determining effect on people's identities (Sen 2007). He argues that the multiple identities, according to the different memberships people may have, are the product of an evaluative process which leads to deliberate choice. Culture, values and context are meaningful, and they exert an influence, as it is not possible to «reason from nowhere» (Sen 1999b, p. 23). Nevertheless, even within specific cultures and communities, there are choices and «[e]very human being has the ability to question and to doubt» (Teschl & Derobert 2008, p. 135). In Sen's view, the order is conspicuous: «reason before identity» (Sen 1999b).

Likewise, social conversion factors can also depend on rationality. Social as well as cultural customs, norms and institutions are the product of people's agency and change because of people's agency. That democratic nations have increased the breadth and depth of rights of their citizens can be an illustration. Social change, thus, is the consequence of a change in the meaning that the *statu quo* has for (a critical mass of) people and their choice to act accordingly.

That rationality is dependent on several conditions, including environmental factors, has been suggested by Sen (1993b) in his discussion regarding the importance of individual position:

> What we can observe depends on our position vis-à-vis the objects of observation. What we decide to believe is influenced by what we observe. How we decide to act relates to our beliefs. Positionally dependent observations, beliefs, and actions are central to our knowledge and practical reason.

4.4. Freedom, achievement and the individual

Whether capabilities or functionings, the CA suggests that evaluations of states ought to take place at the level of the individual. This individualism, however, is not methodological but ethical. The CA rejects the ontological assumption that individuals, and their properties and choices, are all there is to society and the latter is an aggregation of the former; for instance, institutions influence what the values or preferences of people can be and, at the same time, people can influence those institutions. The call to question and assess reasons establishes a strong contrast into incorporating unobservables and meaning into the inquiry.

The CA's individualism is ethical; that is, the ultimate unit of concern is the individual (Robeyns 2017). What is of interest is whether the individual is suffering from deprivations or if they are enjoying freedoms and achievements. Any other alternative, such as a focus on the community, a household or the family, would obscure the inequalities and discriminations that can ensue within them. Relevant issues such as gender, age, ethnicity, etc., can be mistakenly omitted by shifting the locus of attention to collective units of analysis.

This is not to deny that there are collective capabilities and functionings or, indeed, agency. There may be changes in the world that can be achieved only collectively. Voting is a telling example (Sen 2002). That collective agency, however, hinges on individual agencies. Therefore, although the CA does not exclude the former, it privileges the latter.

4.5. Freedom and agency

Opportunity or substantive freedom is intertwined with agency because choosing itself is an exercise of agency. Whether in terms of self-regarding or other-regarding aims, to choose from different options is part of bringing about or achieving change. Hence, to be free is to be an agent[26].

[26] Such assertion seems to exclude important groups such as children, people with disabilities or the elderly, who often have others deciding for them. This, however, seems to be the current focus of the CA and the analysis presented here is restricted to that. Before 1992, with Sen's differentiation between «realized agency success» and «instrumental agency success», these groups could fall under the former. For a discussion, see Crocker and Robeyns (2010).

Expanding the freedoms that people enjoy (and eliminating their unfreedoms), thus, enhances their agency. This expansion, however, is qualified. It neither means that only more options nor that only more choices automatically increase freedom. If options are trivial, no additional amount of them represents an an expansion of freedom. Only the addition of doings and beings that one values and has reason to value count for the effective exercise of agency.

Similarly, increases in the number of choices are not necessarily better for people's lives. There can be an excess of choices when people do not *get to* choose but *have to* choose; that is, when instead of an opportunity, they become and obligation (Sen 1992). Compulsory unvalued choices could be regarded as restrictions on agency not only because, at the extreme, they can be a source of unfreedoms, since they can force one to bring about an unwanted change, but also because they can have an opportunity cost: resources dedicated to attend to them are resources that could have been dedicated to pursue one's considered valuable aims and generate a wanted change. Hence, the CA's emphasis on freedom also means relieving people from unnecessary choice.

Crucially, for the CA, agency freedom also entails responsibility (Sen 1985) and obligations[27] (Sen 2009). Since individuals bring about changes deliberately, and these changes are the result of sustainably reasoning on their preferences and choices, agents are responsible for those changes. Regardless of the outcome produced, whether the state of affairs obtained is the intended one or not, people are responsible for their choices and actions. This is particularly the case in public policy since by its very nature it entails interventions seeking to generate an outcome. Thus, the states of affairs that are brought about can affect the chooser and others. That being so, agents are responsible to both and accountable for their choices and reasons. Thus, assessment of their reasonableness in the public sphere is of especial importance here. As discussed above, such process of what could be regarded as collective reasoning, much like the CA's rationality, is plural.

Certainly, the CA argues for that change to take place in the space of capabilities and functionings. This begs the question, nevertheless, of what are the relevant of capabilities and functionings. Sen has been criticized because it has not provided a definitive list of the freedoms and achievements. That list has not been generated precisely because of the CA's

[27] «Freedom in general and agency freedom in particular are parts of an effective power that a person has, and it would be a mistake to see capability, linked with these ideas of freedom, only as a notion of human advantage: it is also a central concern in understanding our obligations» (Sen 2009, p. 271).

notion of agency. It is up to the people, exercising their agency, to reason about what are the doings and beings they value and have reason to value. Different lists can be established depending on the purposes of the exercise and those involved, and so should they (Sen 2004).

Freedom, therefore, is intrinsic to agency. However, assessing it empirically can prove daunting since, among other things, it may entail the incorporation of counterfactual information, *i.e.,* what one *would* choose had one been given the option. This is referred to as «counterfactual choices». In such cases, exercises can do no better than focusing on achievement, *i.e.,* choice (Sen 1999a). Sen (1992, p. 53) has recognized the challenge posed by that situation and has admitted the need for compromises in the approach:

> Practical compromises have to be based with an eye both to (1) the range of our ultimate interests, and (2) the contingent circumstances of informational availability.
>
> Even when the pragmatic acceptance of limitations of data availability force us to set our sights lower than the full representation of capability sets, it is important to keep the underlying motivations clearly in view and to see practical compromises as the best we can do under the circumstances.

If accounting for capability can prove overly taxing, accounting for agency, which implies the requirements of rationality, is arguably even more so.

5. Capabilitarian agency and the philosophy of science

The capabilitarian agent is a multi-motivated, multidimensional, plural, (un)reflective chooser. They are multi-motivated since self-regarding as well as other-regarding values and preferences guide their decisions and actions. Their multidimensionality lies in the fact that those motivations can lead to outcomes, capability or functionings, in various dimensions constitutive of their being, other than utility but utility inclusive. They are plural because they are characterized by a wide range of personal as well as contextual attributes, which affect their ability to bring their preferences to fruition. Their reflexivity stems from their introspection, which is a matter of degree and dependent on several factors, and enables them to subject their choices, actions and preferences to reasoned

scrutiny. They are choosers to the extent that they have meaningful options from which to choose in order to lead the lives that they value, according to their reasoned conception of the good and in the sense that the change they generate in the world is evidenced in their choices.

The CA seems to show an interesting eclecticism between explanation and interpretation. Accounting for agency requires analyzing actions in light of goals, aims and preferences. While the former may be observable, the latter is not necessarily so. Moreover, both are generated under certain objective circumstances, which may have different meanings for different people. As Archer and Tritter (2001, p. 4) have stated:

> Many of the «agents» properties and powers are subjective in nature and entail their capacity to entertain meanings and to act in relation to them, whilst the «parts», which constitute their structured environment, have objective properties and powers to constrain and enable action. Both therefore and necessarily have to feature in any account of action, such as decision- making. The problem consists in how to combine them.

Because of the nature of the issue and its implications for empirical inquiry, it seems advisable to take one step back and address this problem from the philosophy of science. Given the public policy nature of the CA, the aforementioned insights gain in relevance when considering how to operationalize them. By far, applications of the framework have been dominated by quantitative methods (Fauverque in Zimmermann 2006), based as they usually are on a positivist philosophy of science. This is not surprising given that the CA was conceived within economics. Despite its advantages, this tradition shows some shortcomings when it comes to applying the CA, which has led to resorting to practical compromises (Sen 1999a), and accounting for the CA's agency seems no exception.

While Sen has not addressed explicitly the location of the CA within the philosophy of science, he has shown an interesting ambivalence. In his earlier contributions, despite employing the positivist template, he has pointed towards the importance of revising it. In the first footnote on his *Positional Objectivity* (1993b, p. 126), signaling its instrumental use rather than complete adherence:

> This article does not address the foundational issues in metaphysics that relate to positional dependence, in particular the presumed «duality» between the external world and our conceptual powers. The language of the arguments presented in this article invokes this duality, and it is certainly simpler to see the practical and immediate implications of the claims made here in that classical Cartesian form. However, the full implications of this line of reasoning can be worked out only, I believe, by reexamining the issue of that duality itself.

Nevertheless, positivism's focus on objectivity and prediction, because of its interest in certainty, exposes its scope and limitations. While it may help account for the objective part of the CA's agency, it is not well suited to address the subjective part. Indeed, the call to analyze reasons, which are unobservable, speaks volumes of the ontological challenge posed by the capability approach. Therefore, if the interest is to provide a more faithful account of the capabilitarian agent and not to advance a doctrine, it seems warranted to look elsewhere.

Indeed, Sen (2009, p. 183) acknowledges that the redefinition of rationality challenges the expectations of research when he asserts:

> It is one thing to accept the need to understand the nature of rational choice because of its own importance and also for its relevance in analysing actual choice, but it is quite another to expect that an understanding of rationality of choice could be immediately translated into the prediction of actual choice based on the set of choices that all count as rational, even when human beings are assumed to stick invariably to choices that are rational.

In this context, it may be enticing to consider the other main alternative: constructivism, which focuses on the perceptions, meanings and subjectivities. However, whatever is gained in interpretation is certainly lost in explanation.

Although positivism and constructivism are the most common philosophies of science, often depicted as opposites (see Hollis 1994), there are other alternatives that seek to bridge the gap between objectivity and subjectivity. One example is critical realism, whose combination with the CA at the philosophical (see Martins 2007, 2006) and empirical level (see Tao 2013) has been incipiently suggested. Another, rather promising alternative,

might be pragmatism. This relationship has been inchoately suggested in abstract terms (see Zimmermann 2006) but nothing has been said in terms of the philosophy of science nor as it relates to agency.

Engaging in that exploration is precisely what the CA's agency demands. As agents, scholars also make choices regarding their research, which «seeks to make a difference» (Mehta *et al.* 2006, p. 1) and «is committed to improvement» (Molteberg & Bergstrøm 2000, p. 7). Theories and frameworks (like the CA) are chosen, methods and techniques are decided upon and, of course, consciously or not, the philosophical paradigm advanced is also a choice. Thus, if the goal is to observe the CA's proposition, all these elements should be subjected to critical assessment by oneself and by the academic community in order to find sustainable reason.

6. Conclusions

Sen (1999a, p. 19) has defined agency «[...] in its older —and "grander"— sense». In this sense, he has suggested that agency's importance is threefold: intrinsic, instrumental and constructive. As such, it is not surprising that there is a growing body of literature dedicated to capturing agency empirically in different ways with an ever increasing level of sophistication in its techniques and methods. In order to contribute to these efforts, this paper has sought to shed some light on a logically prior issue: who the CA's agent is. Throughout the discussion, the implications for empirical exercises have been hinted to via the philosophy of science.

The point of departure has been the dominant approach in economics and several disciplines in the social sciences: rational choice theory. It has been argued that because of its focus on self-interest as the only motivation, instrumental rationality as the only mental process, utility as the only evaluative space, choice as the only observable, and the individual as the only ontological entity of concern, the rational choice agent is a selfish, utility maximizing, calculative, atomistic chooser. Further, it has been suggested that this characterization is the result of RCT's adherence to positivism and its pursuit of objectivity and prediction in the quest for certainty.

Conversely, the CA suggests a richer image. From Sen's definition of agency, two components come to forefront, namely, acting or freedom and judging or rationality. In

reverse order, to underline its contrast *vis-à-vis* the convention, judgment has been addressed first. Rationality, for the CA, is a wider concept and entails subjecting the agent's actions, choices, values and preferences to reasoned scrutiny. By redefining rationality so, the CA opens up the individual's black box harnessing introspection and self-evaluation in order to question one's actions, decisions, reasons, and even reasons for those reasons (or preferences about preferences). Consequently, the studying the CA's agent entails the inclusion of unobservables.

The CA's freedom has also been consequential for agency. Substantive freedom is the effective opportunity one has to choose the life one values and has reason to value. Several issues have been raised. First, the interdependence between rationality and freedom has been highlighted inferring from this that rationality is: *i)* a matter of degree, *ii)* plural, and *iii)* dependent on several factors. Then, the intrinsic relevance of freedom has been discussed showing how it implies a challenge to an exclusive focus on choice. Subsequently, the dynamics between rationality and achievement as well as with conversion factors were addressed. Finally, the CA's individualism has been discussed showing that, contrary to the convention, it is not methodological, thus neither ontological nor epistemological, but ethical, which means that individuals are ultimate units of concern for assessments.

Consequently, the capabilitarian agent can be regarded as a multi-motivated, multidimensional, plural, and reflective chooser. Agents have self-regarding as well as other regarding motivations. Their goals and aims, whether in the space of capability or functionings, can be related to a wide range of dimensions, regardless of their contribution to utility. Agents depend on their personal as well as contextual attributes in order to act and their actions can shape themselves as well as their context. The change that agents bring about is the product of critical assessment, introspection and reflection on their actions, choices and preferences, which is a quality itself subject to change. Agents are also choosers to the extent that they have effective opportunity to choose from meaningful options of considered valuable types of life and in the sense that the change they generate in the world is evidenced in their choices.

In this sense, in answering the question «what does the capabilitarian agent look like?», it has been argued that one need not only «look». The argument suggests emphasis on observation, comes from the positivist's focus on objectivity and prediction, which have

led to practical comprises in applications of the CA. However, if different philosophies of science are considered, less compromising might be required.

The capabilitarian agent demands a move from the exclusive focus on measurement to the inclusion of meaning. This suggests that it may prove fruitful to employ the CA in tandem with more interpretive approaches. While it is doubtful that extreme versions of constructivism can do justice to the CA's agency, interesting attempts have been carried out of late. One example is that of critical realism, for which there is incipient work. Another one, which seems quite promising is pragmatism, although nothing has been said about it *qua* philosophy of science nor agency. Such line of research seems not only necessary but, in fact, meets the demands CA's agency. The CA calls for all agents to subject their actions, choices, preferences and values, including preferences for preferences, to personal and collective critical scrutiny until sustainable reason is reached. For development scholars and practitioners, this entails the evaluation of all their decisions, including the philosophy of science. That is the rational and reasonable thing to do.

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Part II
Pragmatism and pragmatic agency

The eye – it cannot choose but see;
We cannot bid the ear be still;
Our bodies feel, where're they be;
Against or with our will
- Wordsworth

Chapter 3
Form follows function in evidence-based public policy: the pragmatic alternative to the positivist orthodoxy[28]
Capítulo 3
El diseño depende de la funcionalidad en la política pública basada en la evidencia: la alternativa pragmática a la ortodoxia positivista

Abstract

For quite some time now there has been a push for more evidence-based public policy. The premise has been that policies informed by reliable data and analysis will achieve their expected results. To a great extent, this demand has been answered by evidence built on the dominant approach in science: positivism. This paper argues that positivism has important shortcomings which make it detrimental to that project. Thus, it makes the case for pragmatism as a plausible alternative. The argument departs from the philosophy of science, establishing the principles underlining each approach and then elaborates how they translate to the production and evaluation of evidence. The abandonment of the positivist pursuit of certainty for a pragmatic recognition of the plurality of human experience and the diversity of contexts allows to set a clearer scope for the use of evidence, potentially enhancing the effectiveness of policies based on it.

Keywords: evidence-based policy, positivism, pragmatism, public policy, philosophy of science

Resumen

Desde hace cierto tiempo hay un impulso para políticas públicas basadas en la evidencia. La premisa es que políticas nutridas por información y análisis confiables alcanzarán los resultados esperados. En gran medida esta demanda se ha respondido mediante evidencia apoyada en el enfoque dominante en las ciencias: el positivismo. Este artículo arguye que el positivismo tiene importantes limitaciones que lo hacen perjudicial para ese proyecto. Así, presenta al pragmatismo como una alternativa plausible. El argumento parte de la filosofía de la ciencia, establece los principios que sustentan cada enfoque y desarrolla cómo se traducen en la producción y evaluación de evidencia. El abandono de la búsqueda

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positivista de certezas por la admisión pragmática de la pluralidad de la experiencia humana y la diversidad de contextos permite establecer un alcance más claro para el uso de evidencias, potencialmente mejorando la efectividad de las políticas públicas basadas en ellas.

Palabras clave: política basada en la evidencia, positivismo, pragmatismo, políticas públicas, filosofía de la ciencia

1. Introduction

Public policies are concerned with actions in order to maintain or change a state of affairs. Their significance for society at large can hardly be overstated as, directly or indirectly, in the short- or in the long-run they affect people's lives (Sen 1999). Additionally, they are of the outmost importance for politicians and policy makers, for they are accountable to their constituents in terms of delivering on their campaign promises, which are translated into policies. Therefore, policy effectiveness has become an increasing concern for many. In this sense, since approximately the turn of the century, there has been a plea in academic and practitioner circles for (more) evidence-based public policy. This is a means to an end. Policy making informed by dependable data and insights is believed to be more effective; that is, it is more likely to do what it is set out to and to achieve its expected results. This has been met, to a large extent, by research and assessment based theoretically on the model of instrumental rationality (Sanderson 2002, Colebatch 1998, Schwandt 1997) and methodologically on measurement, reliability, validity and other aspects pertaining quantitative methods (Shaw 1999); that is, a program abiding by the dominant approach in science: positivism. As necessary and urgent as this undertaking is, and as useful as positivism has been to explain and predict phenomena in the natural world, its application in the social sciences in general, and public policy particularly, may currently be detrimental to this cause.

Based on the success of the natural sciences, positivism uses their assumptions and methods in the social world. This leads to the pursuit of absolute, immutable and universal truths in society (Garcés 2016a). Only claims that meet this high standard are considered reliable and, thus, (scientific) knowledge. The often conclusive tone of positivist research is explained by this expectation and aspiration. Such goal is plausible only due to the philosophical assumptions undergirding positivism, namely, that there is a world «out there», independent of the mind, that can be known as it is (ontology) if only the right methods and strategies are employed, which would lead to knowledge mirroring that world, *i.e.,* achieving objectivity (epistemology) (Jackson 2011, Hollis 1994). The positivist promise is enticing given what is at stake in public policy for stakeholders as well as policy-makers and politicians. Nevertheless, the truth-searching project seems far from actual human experience and making the purposes of research fit into a pre-established design and methods seems akin to making function follow form.

As such, there is an increasing number of voices calling it into question, both theoretically and methodologically. At the level of methods, a telling example is the caution raised regarding the use of experimental methods in general (see, *e.g.,* Al-Ubaydli, List & Suskind 2017, Hennessy & Strebulaev 2015) and its derivation, the randomized control trials particularly (see, *e.g.,* Deaton & Cartwright 2017; Bédécarrats, Guérin & Roubaud 2017), which epitomize the positivist strategy (Moses & Knutsen 2012), dominant in policy evaluation. At the level of theory, it puts insensible expectations for the production of evidence and unreasonable anxiety on those performing it. At this level, relatively less has been said, as the literature has focused on increasing the sophistication of techniques instead of challenging the philosophical paradigm on which they are based. Therefore, such a discussion seems necessary and urgent. In that endeavor, pragmatism is here advanced as a plausible alternative.

Pragmatism is a philosophy that seeks to adequately account for actual human experience. Its focus is on action (Friedrichs & Kratochwil 2009) and practical consequences (James 1904, Peirce 1905). It is a naturalist approach that sees action as a process constituted by the dynamics and exchanges between an organism and its environment (Talisse & Aikin 2011). In this sense, it is described as a transaction that encompasses all action, included that by human beings (Dewey 1985). Whenever human action is impeded, different hypotheses are tried in order to remove the hindrance and further action again (Smith 2004). The attempts made and tools employed can vary in terms of the characteristics of the individual(s) involved as well as those of the context(s). Accounting for such diversity in responses is possible given that positivist assumptions are abandoned: there is no mind- independent world that can be known as it is. The world is always confronted from a specific perspective and, thus, all knowledge of the world in imbued by that perspective (Kratochwil 2011). Hence, there are no pre-established methods and techniques to generate knowledge. Instead, the strategies utilized obey the purposes of the investigation, *i.e.,* for pragmatism, form follows function. In that sense, producing evidence pragmatically requires acknowledgement of all the aspects involved in that process and transparent and explicit discussion of them. Evidence so produced presents a more plausible scope of application and, therefore, policies so informed are likely to be more effective.

To flesh out that argument, in this paper the above mentioned approaches are discussed at the level of the philosophy of science and then accounts for their implications for

empirical inquiry. The structure is as follows: first positivism is introduced; second, the influence of positivism in the social sciences and public policy is presented; against that backdrop, in the third section, pragmatism as an alternative to carry out research and produce evidence is discussed; in the fourth, the implications of pragmatism for public policy are elaborated and, in the final section, the argument is concluded.

2. Positivism

Positivism is the most influential philosophical approach to knowledge production in the social sciences. As such, it also dominates the generation of the evidence that nurtures policy making. This approach is characterized by its firm advocacy for the use of the model of the natural sciences (Noor 2008, Garcés 2016a). In public policy (and the social sciences more broadly), positivism has been the subject of strong and sound criticism from different perspectives (see Sanderson 2002, Crotty 1998, Guba & Lincoln 1989) over the last decades. Nevertheless, the rather conclusive tone of much current research and evidence in public policy, particularly when they present opposing findings regarding the same issue and subject matter, is a sign of both its continuing dominance and limitations.

Discussing positivism is a discussion on the philosophy of science. The philosophy of (social) science can be traced back, at least, to the Greeks. It could be argued that originally philosophy was not conceived to be different from science. In his *Metaphysics,* for example, Aristotle does not differentiate *philosophia* from *episteme* (scientific knowledge) (Waugh & Ariew 2008). The tradition of equating science with episteme and episteme with philosophy seems to endure over the centuries. Perhaps, one of the most evident illustrations of this is Rene Descartes' tree analogy. In the Preface of his *Principia Philosophiae,* he refers to philosophy as being «like a tree whose roots are metaphysics, whose trunk is physics, and whose branches, which issue from this trunk, are all the other sciences. These reduce themselves to three principal ones, namely, medicine, mechanics, and morals» (in Waugh and Ariew 2008, p. 16). In this sense, if not strictly the same, there seems to be, at least, a markedly continuity among philosophy and the known sciences within one clear entity or unity.

The above notwithstanding, Descartes marks a stark contrast with previous philosophical efforts. His project takes place precisely during the emergence of the «new sciences», which sought to rid nature of myth and notions of volition. This can be illustrated by the

work of the Scholastics, which, by combining Christian beliefs with classical philosophy, suggest that nature has not only structure but purpose (Bacon 2012). Instead, the new sciences, led by Newtonian physics, endeavored to generate scientific knowledge and explain phenomena by recourse to discovering the universal laws by which the world is governed. This enterprise was understood as «lifting the veil of nature». Put simply, it was an undertaking to get to know the world as it truly is. The belief was that by using the right tools and methods, nature can become accessible. The notable success of the new sciences in explaining natural phenomena in a reliable manner, and to make it predictable, underscored this belief. In this context, Descartes sought to contribute to that objective by providing the philosophical arguments on which those sciences could build.

Descartes (1956, 1993) develops what is now known as «rationalism». This philosophical tradition can be helpfully elaborated in terms of its ontological and epistemological implications. Ontologically, he distinguishes two kinds of substances, namely, the mind and the body. This has also been conceived as a distinction between the mind and the world and therefore it is referred to, henceforth as «mind-body» or «mind-world dualism». Therefore, Descartes regarded the mind as an existing entity differentiated from the other substance. While the mind was a thinking substance, immaterial and inextensible, the body was the exact opposite (Descartes 1993). Further, whereas the latter, because of its material nature was subject to mechanical laws, the former was not. In this sense, the body lacks any mental properties, which are the exclusive jurisdiction of the mind.

This hints towards the epistemological implications of Cartesian thought. Knowledge can solely come from the mind. The body can only perceive, by dint of the senses. However, sense perception is not a reliable source of knowledge, as it can be deceived and fooled (perhaps, visual illusions exemplify Descartes' point nowadays). Moreover, sense experience is individual, fluid and dependent on a variety of external factors. Hence, knowledge based on sensation is at best probabilistic and doubtful, at worst misleading and erroneous. Descartes, within the context of the new sciences and their pursuit of universal, immutable laws, considered only the latter as knowledge, that is knowledge was universal and immutable. That being so, relative and variable information, which is what the senses generate, cannot amount to it. Knowledge, thus, was to be absolute and certain and Descartes sought absolute certainty (Quinton 2010). In order to achieve it, he proposed the method of absolute doubt (leading eventually to *cogito ergo sum*). In this

sense, not only there is a differentiation between the mind and the body, but there is a primacy of the mind over the body.

The corollary of rationalism is the preference for deduction. Because only inferences made by the mind can ever be certain and amount to knowledge, absolute mechanistic principles can only be generated by the mind. Therefore, Descartes favored the elaboration of explanations deduced from universal laws, which are themselves derived from other mind-generated inner concepts. Philosophy, therefore, became entrusted with the task of providing those foundations, as «basic beliefs», for the natural sciences (Bacon 2012). Accordingly, truth is pursued and reached by thought. Only those ideas that are coherently deduced from other basic and certain ideas can be certain as well and therefore regarded as knowledge. This approach is roughly represented contemporarily by coherence theories of truth.

This position was influentially challenged most notably by empiricism. Although not completely opposed to some Cartesian insights, seeking to further scientific progress, empiricism arrives at contrasting conclusions. As in the case above, this standpoint can be analyzed in terms of its ontological and epistemological implications. Regarding the former, there is not much change from the Cartesian assumptions. In fact, its dualism is inherited. Thus, the mind and the world are differentiated from one another and remain separated. However, the separation is interpreted differently deriving other implications for the production of knowledge. Therefore, epistemologically, the direction taken by empiricism is different. Empiricism privileges sense experience as a route to certainty. The mind is not assumed to be a thinking entity but a blank slate on which external objects imprint their characteristics through the senses. Against rationalism's goal to restrict knowledge to thought only, empiricism favors knowledge that can be observed and therefore can be checked. That is, it advances evidence-based knowledge that is grounded on actual experience.

As such, and contrary to rationalism, empiricism favors induction. Given that knowledge only comes from sensory perception, explanations of current events and predictions of future ones can only be inducted from specific past experiences or instances of those events. Although it is acknowledged that expecting the future to resemble the past simply because of iteration of previous events is not logical, it is also recognized that human beings, relying on such reasoning, have and do further both common and scientific

undertakings (Dicker 1998). Given that for empiricism knowledge is based on observable (*i.e.,* sense-perceptible) evidence of the world, only those claims that reflect or mirror the world or reality as it is can be considered as truth. Hence, roughly contemporary correspondence theories of truth illustrate this philosophical tradition.

Hildebrand (2008, p. 43) summarizes the discussion so far quite well when he states:

> Empiricism maintains that an objective, external world writes its story elements in our minds; when we can express that story in an order that corresponds to the world, there is objective knowledge. Rationalism argues that knowledge is not an inner-outer correspondence but a coherence of inner concepts; this harmony is grasped not by the senses but by the introspective light of consciousness shining on its own conceptual landscape.

Despite the tensions between rationalism and empiricism, as mentioned at the outset of this section, they find coexistence in positivism. This is illustrated in the work of the empiricist David Hume. For him, experience is understood as sense perception as well as introspective awareness of one's own state of mind (Dicker 1998). In this light, the scope, the limits and the justification of all knowledge is attributed to experience (Rosenberg 1993). Consequently, the rationalist primacy of the mind is abandoned but its contribution to knowledge production is acknowledged as complementary to knowledge generated by sense perception.

This introduces the division of knowable statements, which, as is argued below, reflects the genealogy positivism. Hume (in Fogelin 1993, p. 96) states that «[a]ll the objects of human reason or enquiry may naturally be divided into two kinds, to wit, *Relations of Ideas,* and *Matters of Fact*. Of the first kind are the sciences of Geometry, Algebra, and Arithmetic and, in short, every affirmation, which is either intuitively or demonstratively certain». Apropos the second kind, he posits «[m]atters of fact, which are the second objects of human reason, are not ascertained in the same manner; nor is our evidence of their truth, however great, of a like nature with the foregoing. The contrary of every matter of fact is still possible; because it can never imply a contradiction, and is conceived by the mind with the same facility and distinctness, as if ever so conformable to reality» (Hume in Fogelin 1993, p. 96).

Positivism has not only reigned over the natural sciences but has dominated the social sciences as well. Because of the success displayed by the natural sciences in explaining and predicting phenomena in the natural world, their insights and method were adopted to study the social world (Noor 2008). Positivism in the social sciences is usefully exemplified by August Comte who, participating in the project of ridding philosophy of metaphysics (Kaboub 2008), proposed also a positivist sociology as the science to study society. In his *System of Positive Polity* (2012), he establishes a unity in science by dint of what he terms a «theory of development». Within this framework, he establishes a continuity among the sciences the order of which depends negatively on the generality of the phenomena under study or, what is the same, positively on their complexity, to wit, mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, and sociology. Each builds and depends on the previous one. Hence, in *A General View of Positivism* (2009), he asserts: «Social Philosophy, therefore, ought on every ground to be preceded by Natural Philosophy in the ordinary sense of the word» (Comte 2009, p. 44). Hence, the insights and methods of the natural sciences were to be used in the social sciences. Importantly, the goal was not only to explain and predict society but to make it better. In other words, the goal was not solely scientific progress but social progress. As he states, «the object of philosophy is to present a systematic view of human life, as a basis for modifying its imperfections» (Comte 2009, p. 8).

The tradition described above is presumably best reflected in more contemporary debates by the Vienna Circle and its logical positivism[29]. The endeavor, with the same aim of rationalism and empiricism before it, was to propose solid philosophical foundations on which science can build on. In order to do that, a closer resemblance between the natural sciences and philosophy itself was attempted. Put simply, the strategy was to make philosophy more scientific (Waugh & Ariew 2008). Hence, knowledge claims, the proposal suggested, were to be assessed in terms of their meaningfulness. This entailed an evaluation of their cognitive content. Only statements considered cognitively significant were deemed adequate for scientific inquiry (Uebel 2014). Further, these statements were only of two kinds: analytic or synthetic (Caldwell 1994).

This classification is clearly redolent of Hume's. Analytic statements were tautologies, self-contradictions or any statement that is true because of their meaning (Putnam 2002). «All

[29] Some of the more significant members over the years included Rudolf Carnap, Herbert Feigl, Philipp Frank, Kurt Gödel, Hans Hahn, Karl Menger (the economist's son), Otto Neurath, and Friedrich Waismann (Caldwell 1994, p. 11).

bachelors are single men» is an example, often cited, of this sort of statement. This phrase is true in and of itself because of the meaning of the words that constitute it. It requires nothing external to itself to assess its cognitive content and significance. As such, *a priori* reasoning suffices to justify them (Uebel 2014). Synthetic statements, conversely, required external resources to assess their cognitive significance. These were factual statements that could be confirmed by empirical evidence (Caldwell 1994). Any statement that refers to the world could exemplify this type of proposition. For instance, «all swans are white» can be regarded as a synthetic statement in need of verification before it can be regarded as a knowledge claim. Therefore, these statements were justifiably only *a posteriori* (Uebel 2014).

Logical positivism's differentiation between analytic and synthetic propositions within the same epistemology illustrates positivism's internal tensions. While analytic statements show rationalism's influence, synthetic statements reflect empiricism's dominance. Originally conflicting positions in the philosophy of science were joined in positivism. This combination arguably answered to practical reasons. Whereas it was rather straight forward to support the most successful natural sciences such as physics and chemistry, which based their knowledge claims on evidence, the case for formal sciences such as mathematics, which based their knowledge claims on the logic derived from the meaning of their constitutive words, was less so. Therefore, acknowledgement of analytic statements was important to «[…] renew empiricism by freeing it from the impossible task of grounding logical and mathematical knowledge» (Uebel 2014, p. 90).

The analytic-synthetic division of propositions as exhausting what is scientifically knowable underscores logical positivism's quest for truth in objectivity. Much like the two traditions on which it builds, logical positivism equated (scientific) knowledge with certainty. As such, it sought to discover immutable, universal, absolute truths. This project entailed eliminating from scientific consideration all of that which may be conjunctural, flexible, relative, individual. The differentiation between objectivity and subjectivity encapsulates this goal. Subjectivity refers to the quality of those statements composed of fluid elements. Subjective propositions were considered non-analytic, non-synthetic because they are laden with value (whether ethical, aesthetical or other). As such, their meaning depends on different factors related to the context and the individual involved in an event of interest. Hence, the differentiation is also presented as the fact/value dichotomy.

Objectivity, in turn, refers to the stated aim of generating unchanging knowledge. To do this, the locus of attention was placed on facts, understood as events absent all value. This was possible because of the aforementioned ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning positivism. To recall, the mind is separated and independent from the world and, at the same time, that mind-independent world can be known as it is. Since the world is objective and it can be known as it is, objectivity is possible. Only knowledge that reflects or mirrors that world, that reality, is certain and true. Therefore, only that knowledge is reliable to further science with confidence.

3. Positivist Public Policy

Being that economics is the most influential discipline in public policy (Thaler 2015), it seems like an appropriate point of departure to attest the influence of positivism in the social sciences. This is perhaps best summarized by Milton Friedman (1953) in his *The Methodology of Positive Economics,* which initiates by asserting that the enterprise is objectivity, as he puts it: «[P]ositive economics is in principle independent of any particular ethical position or normative judgements» (Friedman 1953, p. 4). He argues further in terms of what that entails as it pertains goals, merging thereby the elements discussed above, and it is worth quoting him at length:

> The ultimate goal of a positive science is the development of a «theory» or «hypothesis» that yields valid and meaningful (*i.e.,* not truistic) predictions about phenomena not yet observed. Such a theory is, in general, a complex intermixture of two elements. In part, it is a «language» designed to promote «systematic and organized methods of reasoning». In part, it is a body of substantive hypotheses designed to abstract essential features of complex reality [...]. Viewed as a language, theory has no substantive content; it is a set of tautologies. Its function is to serve as a filing system for organizing empirical material and facilitating our understanding of it; and the criteria by which it is to be judged are those appropriate to a filing system (Friedman 1953, p. 7).

Further, he then elaborates:

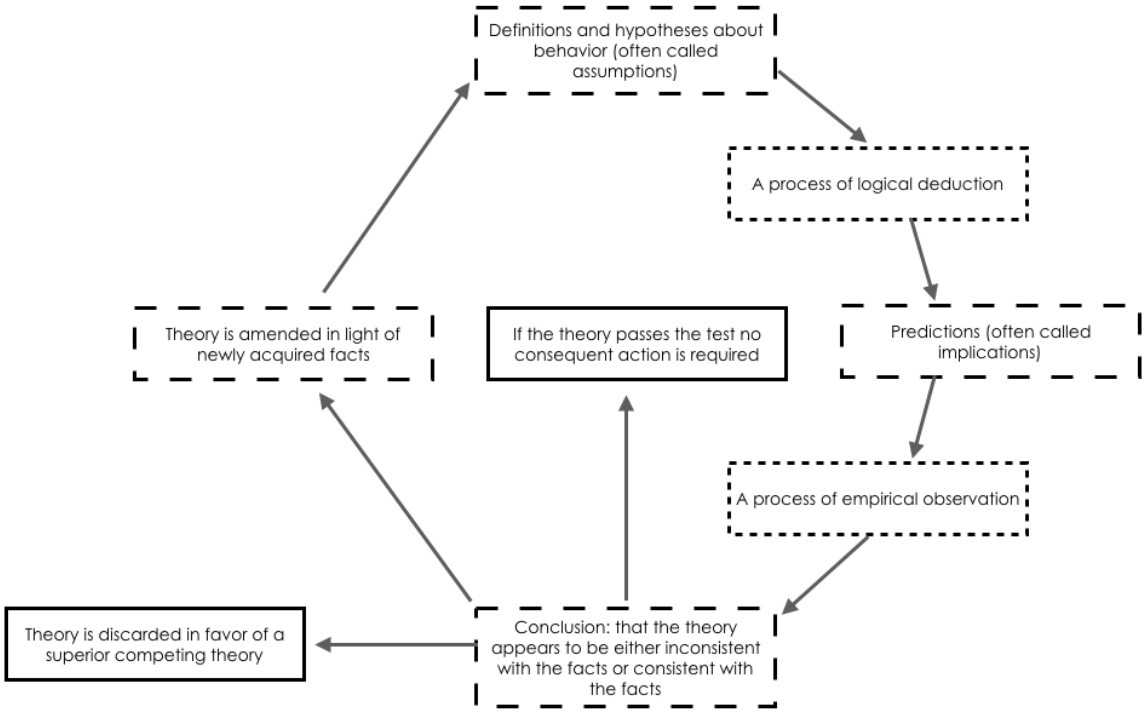
> Viewed as a body of substantive hypotheses, theory is to be judged by its predictive

> power for the class of phenomena which it is intended to «explain». Only factual evidence can show whether it is «right» or «wrong» or, better, tentatively «accepted» as valid or «rejected». As I shall argue at greater length below, the only relevant test of the validity of a hypothesis is comparison of its predictions with experience. The hypothesis is rejected if its predictions are contradicted («frequently» or more often than predictions from an alternative hypothesis); it is accepted if its predictions are not contradicted; great confidence is attached to it if it has survived many opportunities for contradiction. Factual evidence can never «prove» a hypothesis; it can only fail to disprove it, which is what we generally mean when we say, somewhat inexactly, that the hypothesis has been «confirmed» by experience (Friedman 1953, pp. 8-9).

As can be appreciated, Friedman subscribes quite clearly to the characteristics of positivism described above. First, he starts by associating a positivist science with objectivity; that is, the separation of facts from values and making it science's concern to care only for the former. Certainly, this is argued in light of the ontological assumption that the world is independent of the mind and can be known as it is. Second, its definition of theory includes the analytic-synthetic distinction. On the one hand, the element of language as a set of tautologies refers analytic statements; on the other, substantive hypothesis to be confirmed by experience denotes synthetic ones.

In this light, theories are explanatory propositions that are empirically confirmed and whose value lies on their predictive power. This approach to inquiry has been usefully illustrated by Lipsey (in Hollis 1994), who presents the process by which a positivist study can (ought to) be carried out (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Illustration of the process of positivist inquiry



Source: based on Hollis (1994)

Elaboration: author

The discussion regarding theory is meaningful for public policy because policies are based on some causal intuition or theory. Policies address a given issue identified as wanting attention (whether it is problematic, as in some undesirable behavior in need of correction, or beneficial, as in the case of a desirable behavior in need of reinforcement), by establishing the causes for it and proposing the means to achieve the desired end. As argued by Perret (1997 in Varone, Rihoux & Marx 2006, p. 219), «a policy can be interpreted as a theoretical construction, in the sense that it implies an *a priori* representation of the measures implemented, of the actors' behaviour, of the sequence of measures undertaken and of the effects produced on society».

Those theories are built by dint of Lipsey's process, which describes what positivism regards as systematic research. Its results are considered «evidence» (Head 2008). In public policy, this is relevant because particularly, since the turn of the century, there has been a growing push towards «evidence-based» policy. This is partly due to public policy's *raison d'être,* namely, social improvement. In observance of that commitment, academics

and practitioners have stressed the importance of carrying out research useful not only to understand society but to make it better (Solesbury 2002), on the one hand, and the necessity of more effective and efficient policies on the other (Head 2008). Evidence-based policy constitutes a means towards that twofold end.

By basing policy on accurate, precise and reliable findings of scientific inquiry, *i.e.,* true knowledge, the intention is to guarantee the generation of expected results. «Conventionally, we assume that reliable knowledge provides a sound basis for effective action; it is explanatory and theoretical, providing an understanding of how policies work» (Sanderson 2002, p. 3). Consequently, the interest of policy has been placed on scrutinizing «what works». In the case of positivism, this is akin to the generation of theories that are empirically supported and, as such, predict the phenomena with which they are concerned. They can only do so because they are objective, *i.e.,* because they account for the processes of the world as it is.

In that endeavor, positivism builds on the insights and methods of the natural sciences. Bryman (1984, p. 77) discusses the influence of positivism in public policy analysis and depicts its influence at the level of methods with the example of a positivist use of quantitative methods (of data collection and analysis) by stating that

> the social survey is typically seen as the preferred instrument of research within this [positivism] tradition because it can apparently be readily adapted to such concerns. Through questionnaire items concepts can be operationalized; objectivity is maintained by the distance between observer and observed along with the possibility of external checks upon one's questionnaire; replication can be carried out by employing the same research instrument in another context; and the problem of causality has been eased by the emergence of path analysis and related regression techniques to which surveys are well suited.

Interestingly, however, this rather straight forward approach has encountered some trouble. Friedman (1953, p. 34) himself seems to disregard some of the firm positions he establishes in his seminal text when he asserts:

> If a class of «economic phenomena» appears varied and complex, it is, we must suppose, because we have no adequate theory to explain them. Known facts cannot

> be set on one side; a theory to apply «closely to reality», on the other. A theory is the way we perceive «facts», and we cannot perceive «facts» without a theory.

This statement suggests, at least, one important implication: the positivist ontological assumption is difficult to be soundly maintained even for an adamant positivist like Friedman. The world cannot not be known as it is. What can be known depends on the theoretical lens that is being used. The corollary seems to be that science arguably cannot be objective, as the researcher approaches the world with theories that make it intelligible, at least intelligible enough to allow them to distinguish fact from non-fact. Presumably, therefore, different theories will have different facts making it possible for there to be discrepancies and contradictions among different theories tackling the same phenomena. The positivist, thus, in the case of competing theories that explain a given event equally well, an equal number of times, will be forced to regard them as equally valid or, significantly, equally true. Certainly, this applies also to other degrees of «trueness». At the extreme, even in absence of alternative theories, if the only one available explains less than 100 % of all cases, that theory is only partially true. It is only true to the extent it can explain the event; that is, it is only true a given per cent of the time. The quest for truth, then, as an absolute seems to be necessarily threatened.

The implication for public policy is consequential. It puts into question the argument in favor of «evidence-based policies». For all the merit that such proposal has at first glance, securing objectivity is certainly not one of them. If there are no facts without theories because theories, as Friedman asserts, determine what counts as facts, then evidence depends on theories as well. A relevant example in current debates is provided by feminist public policy. It would be incorrect (not only politically) to argue that policies influenced by feminist thought are likely to be the same as those otherwise inspired. «Evidence, whether old or new, never speaks for itself» (Pawson 2002, p. 157). Theories determine what the facts are and what evidence is. As such, they make an event intelligible from a given perspective and this has practical consequences in public policy. Feminist theories highlight the role of gender in society. Such framework's importance can be attested at different stages in the policy cycle. In formulation, for instance, policies that incorporate feminist insights are likely to take into consideration gender in the identification of the problem. Similarly, regardless of a policy's influences, employing a feminist perspective in policy evaluation can shed light on the effects of a policy in terms of gender. In both cases, these insights, and the facts and evidence that derive from them, would have been

obscured otherwise. The same, of course, applies to other relevant foci such as class, ethnicity, the environment, etc., and even more so if some of them are combined.

The discussion so far has argued that positivism, as a philosophical tradition searching for certainty, is the product of the combination of insights from different sources. Further, the coexistence of some of its ideas is not tension-free and this tension is not alleviated by positivist means. In light of the above, severe criticism has been raised to this approach to scientific inquiry. Suppe (1977, p. 632) is emphatic asserting that «[…] the positivistic program for philosophy of science has been repudiated by contemporary philosophy of science».

Nonetheless, positivism has proven to be pervasive within social science. Particularly, economics seems to be a devout follower. As Caldwell (1994, p. 4) states, «[f]ew economists keep up with developments in the philosophy of science, and as such it is understandable that many may still labor under the illusion that economics is, or can be, a positivist discipline». Given the influence that economics has on public policy, the same arguably applies to the latter.

4. Pragmatism

Pragmatism is a philosophical tradition that offers an alternative to positivism. Its founders and main exponents have been, *inter alia,* Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. More contemporarily, it has been argued that figures such as Donald Davidson, Richard Rorty, Cornel West, and Hilary Putnam carry the pragmatic banner to the present (see, *e.g.,* Bacon 2012). Originated in the United States at the end of the XIX century, and against the backdrop of absolutist thought and its ominous consequences, the initial pragmatists sought to provide a philosophical argument against such ideas. In that effort, they resorted to a naturalist perspective that recognizes the dynamic instead of static character of nature as its main feature. In other words, pragmatism is a philosophy that abandons the quest for constants. If it were to be put in terms of constants, however, it would arguably regard change as the only constant.

To facilitate this discussion, perhaps the best the way would be to tackle ontological and then epistemological implications of pragmatism, thereby establishing a parallel with rationalism and empiricism above. However, this is rather challenging, for it is at this very

level that pragmatism's contribution to the philosophy of science sets out. Differentiating ontology from epistemology and giving them separate treatment only makes sense because of the separation between the mind and the world presented by mind-world dualism. Building on this assumption, ontology dictates what exists (a mind independent world that can be known as it is) and epistemology suggests how to get to know what exists. Consequently, mind-world dualism not only separates the ontology from epistemology but it gives primacy to the former (Jackson 2011). As such, it becomes epistemology's task to bridge the gap between the mind and the world.

Pragmatism challenges this division. Its point of departure is «acting» (Kratochwil 2011), neither «things» as in empiricism nor «reason» as in rationalism. For this perspective, action is an engagement between an organism and its environment. This entails a recognition that there is no separation between them in nature but a continuity. This continuity encompasses all organisms and everything in the environment. From the acts of micro-cell organisms to the behavior of most intelligent animals, actions either maintain a certain state of affairs or change it. Whether a *status quo* or a new situation, both need action to occur. Hence, all action is constitutive of the world. Human action is no different; human beings are part of that world by their very existence and they constitute it by their actions. Scientific endeavors are, of course, also included as world-constitutive actions. Therefore, according to pragmatism, the mind is part of the world and separating them is a false start that leads to unfruitful questions and projects.

If mind-world dualism is abandoned, what is left of ontology and epistemology? In the light of the discussion above, it becomes clear that pragmatism adheres to mind-world monism, the stance that there is no separation between the two. For ontology, this entails that the world is not «out there»; it is not an external reality independent of the mind that can be known as it is. For epistemology, it means, at the very least, that the project of bridging the gap between the mind and the world becomes non-sensical. Thus, the pursuit of truth, certainty and objectivity becomes pointless and is also abandoned.

This does not amount to an abandonment of the world, a rejection of realism and a fall into idealism. For pragmatism, the world exists but, being part of it, human beings only know it through their practices. That means that humans have no direct access to the world and knowledge of the world is necessarily from a particular point of view. The latter is laden with the observer's theories, ideologies, interests and imagination when

encountering that world (Khalil 2004). Therefore, there is no such thing as a purely empirical or value-free phenomenon. Consequently, there is no real dichotomy between analytic and synthetic statements (Quine 1951), and neither is there one between facts and values (Putnam 2002).

The above has bearing for scientific research as pragmatism moves beyond the view of inquiry as a mind passively receiving knowledge from a world that is unveiled to it, as if truth corresponds to reality. Dewey called this «spectator theory of knowledge» (Bacon 2012). Instead, it opts for a naturalistic approach, influenced by Darwin, in which it sees the generation of knowledge as the process of *transaction* between the human organism and its environment (Dewey 1985). Therefore, it regards inquiry as the process by which humans engage with their environment, through manipulation, so as to solve an obstacle until they are able to further human action again. In this sense, it seeks to take seriously actual research practices and human cognition. The aspiration of pragmatism has been described as «[...] a philosophy that is at once naturalist and humanist, a philosophy that fully respects the modern scientific worldview without thereby losing contact with the world of human experience» (Talisse & Aikin 2011, p. 4).

As mentioned above, it is this relationship between humans and their environment that is considered action. In his contribution, Dewey emphasized the concept of «transaction». He dismissed the prevailing notions of self-action and inter-action, which entailed, respectively, that things acted by their own powers, and that one thing is balanced against another thing as in causal relations (Smith 2004). The focus in both notions is on the units that compose them. Transaction, in turn, entails «[...] that systems deal with aspects and phases of action without any attribution to elements or entities supposedly detachable from the system that includes them» (Smith 2004, p. 137). Therefore, the organism-environment transaction constitutes one indivisible unit[30].

From this perspective, inquiry is action. Humans gain knowledge by transacting with the environment, an environment that they partly constitute. Knowing is acting with interests, beliefs and imagination. As such, the latter are as intrinsic as empirical evidence is to statements about «reality», which, in turn, do not solely reflect «reality» but shape it according to the imagination and beliefs that are warranted (Khalil 2004). Thus, the

[30] In this unit, «what is called environment is that in which the conditions called physical are enmeshed in cultural conditions and thereby are more than "physical" in its technical sense» (Dewey & Bentley in Rosenthal 2004, p. 160).

process of knowing helps constitute what is known. Furthermore, the preferences of the inquirer are transformed in trying to satisfy them (Khalil 2004). Therefore, in this process the knower changes as well.

Similarly, in Dewey's pragmatism, action is inquiry. This means that it is a transaction between the knower, agent with beliefs, imagination, interests and preferences, and the known, the object, environment or incentive. On the one hand, the environment helps bringing about an image or a belief in the knower's mind. On the other, the knower interprets the environment in light of their intentions and past experiences. That is, the known cannot be defined independently of the knower, and neither can the belief be defined independently of the environment. Therefore, action as inquiry can be regarded as the synthesis of the self-actionist (most prevalent in anthropological and sociological studies) and the inter-actionist view (dominant in economistic approaches) (Khalil 2004).

Importantly, inquiry is an «experimental transaction» (Dewey in Smith 2004, p. 137). In this sense, pragmatism takes the preliminary character of scientific knowledge seriously. Pragmatists abandon the idea of universal laws in the social world. Dewey (1985, p. 163) states that «[...] conceptions, theories and systems of thought [...] are tools. As in the case of all tools, their value resides not in themselves but in their capacity to work shown in the consequences of their use». Once these tools can no longer fulfill their purpose, new ones are required. Thus, any «knowledge» (or what positivism would call «truth») established via pragmatic science settles a controversial or complex issue, or answers a specific question, for the time being, until something appears to disturb the settlement, forcing inquiry to start anew (Cochran 2002). As a matter of fact, Dewey did not endorse the use of the term «truth» due to is positivist connotation, although he used it under this caveat. Instead, he favored «warranted assertibility» (Quinton 2010) to describe the state in which a hypothesis succeeds in turning an indeterminate situation (one in which there is an issue to be resolved, which prompts inquiry) into a determinate one[31] (Bacon 2012). This fundamental character of knowledge is what defines pragmatism (and classical pragmatists) as fallibilist[32]. Furthermore, that something cannot be anything. Dewey (2008) emphasizes that questioning presumptive knowledge requires reasons. Although

[31] Indeed, Dewey was even reluctant to use the word «knowledge» as he would not call that anything provisional but considered knowledge as the final goal of inquiry (see Smith 2004).
[32] «Charles Peirce declared himself a fallibilist. John Dewey elaborated on the hopelessness of the quest for certainty. And although William James acknowledged that we can have knowledge we can never know for certain when we have it» (Levi 2004, p. 240).

the confidence placed on knowledge is provisional, such objects are considered settled until there is reason to doubt them.

As such, pragmatism is a philosophy that is concerned with action and practical consequences. It places the locus of inquiry on addressing actual problems creatively and accepting the incomplete nature of knowledge. This is well illustrated in pragmatism's theory of meaning. The pragmatic maxim stated by Peirce (1905, p. 171, emphasis in the original) stated: «Consider what effects that might conceivably have practical bearings you conceive the object of your conception to have. Then your conception of those effects is the WHOLE of your conception of the object».

Later, this view would be extended, in an anti-positivist manner, by William James (1904, pp. 673-674) who asserts:

> To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve – what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, whether immediate or remote, is then for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all.

5. Pragmatic Public Policy

In the social sciences, a pragmatic approach offers an alternative to positivism to carry out research. While positivism has sought to study the social world with some assumptions believed to be valid in the natural world to achieve certainty, leading it eventually to making human experience fit its pre-established methods, pragmatism seeks to account for human experience and rid science of the anxiety of the pursuit of truth, thereby making the methods fit human experience. As discussed above, positivism has defined and set up a structure and procedure of what constitutes systematic research. Inquiry seeking to generate scientific knowledge ought to abide by those rules. This means that the purposes of research ought to fit within the model and methods designated as adequate. In other words, for positivism function follows form. This seems akin to putting the cart before the horse. Conversely, in pragmatism, the shape that inquiry takes depends on its purpose. It

is the aims and motivations of research that suggest the adequate methods and design. That is, in pragmatic inquiry form follows function.

Pragmatism's focus on actions and practical consequences guides what is considered as warranting assertion. Since inquiry is prompted whenever action is somehow inhibited, then that which overcomes the hindrance, thereby allowing action to continue, warrants assertion. This settles the problem temporarily until there is reason to dislodge that settlement. If action becomes thwarted in the future, this would call for questioning that settlement and proposing a new one, which is to be assessed with the same criteria. Presumably, it is because of this that in conventional parlance the term «pragmatism» is associated with «a concern with success in practical terms» and «pragmatic» is related to «what works» (Head 2008). Nevertheless, pragmatism does not mean relativism. «What works» is not the same as «anything goes». It is worth stressing that action ensues as a naturalistic process, one that is necessarily contextual and historical. In pragmatic scientific research, this entails that research ought to consider past and current debates, observe the standards placed within the discipline and respective epistemic communities for which it is relevant (Friedrichs & Kratochwil 2009), and contribute creatively on those bases.

Public policy has much in common with pragmatism. The affinity is, at least, twofold: the interest in practical consequences and in effective results. These aspects are, of course, intertwined. Although public policy ultimately answers to certain philosophical assumptions (consider, for instance, the principles about human beings and their rationality behind neoliberal or protectionist policies in international trade, neoclassical or Keynesian policies regarding public expenditure in times of recession and more currently, and broadly, traditional or behavioral economics theories inspiring policies in a wide range of areas), its main focus is on delivering some expected result. In fact, they are not often evaluated in terms of their internal cohesion but in terms of their consequences[33]. Since policies are based on some causal theory, that assessment in no small measure reflects Friedman's (1953) above mentioned exclusive focus on prediction of phenomena not yet observable (did the policy accomplish or achieve what it was supposed to?). Hence, public policy evaluation is mostly consequentialist and the criterion on which is based is effectiveness.

[33] This is not to say that this is the only sort of policy evaluation. There are many different kinds that focus on different aspects and phases of the policy cycle. However, assessment of results related to expectations is certainly the most common.

It is precisely in their effectiveness that public policies could potentially benefit from a pragmatic approach. As mentioned above, there is an increasing plea for policy making to be based on evidence in order to secure that their actual results match the expected ones. This seems like a reasonable request until it is framed within the positivist project and its implausible demand for «truth». Under pragmatism, however, this request becomes realizable. Rather than certitude, evidence is considered as that which enables action to be furthered; that is, that which warrants assertion. Moreover, because human action is a transaction between the human organism and the environment, what turns an indeterminate situation into a determinate one is likely to differ depending on factors related to characteristics of both the organism and the environment. The more heterogeneity they show, the more likely it is that different hypotheses overcome the hindrance to action. That is, instead of a one-size-fits-all solution, there may be many warranted assertions for the same problem and that deliver similar results.

So far so pragmatic, at least in terms of action being inquiry, but for pragmatism, inquiry is action as well. That means that as complex as the account of evidence provided above is, it is still not pragmatic enough. Since evidence cannot speak for itself, it is necessary to discuss also the inquirer, who produces the evidence. She is also an organism in an environment, in the midst of a transaction. What the problem is, and if or not it has been overcome, is not given, for there is no objective world against which such assessment can be made; instead, it depends on the lenses (theories, customs, and ideologies) used by the inquirer. Assuming that there is clarity in terms of the perspective(s) used when producing the evidence, and that they were consistently and adequately used across all cases, the description made above obtains. Put simply, the same outcome is likely to be delivered by different variations of a policy depending on the features of those affected by the policy as well as the context in which the policy is implemented.

Consequently, a pragmatic public policy is likely to be more effective than the conventional one because of its attention to context diversity and human plurality. How can these aspects be accounted for in practice will depend on the purposes of inquiry and other related factors such as the theoretical framework employed. Pragmatism does not prescribe a specific method. In fact, it privileges creativity and variety in the use of methods (Kratochwil 2011). Dewey, notably, took issue with the one-size-fits all approach to inquiry established by the positivist «scientific method». Indeed, he stressed that

«there is no kind of inquiry which has a monopoly of the honorable title of knowledge» (Dewey in Hands 2004, p. 262). As such, there is no privileging of a particular approach or method over other. The method's pertinence cannot be determined *a priori* but must be selected according to the purpose of research. Justification of design, strategy and the specific techniques used are made in terms of its goals. This allows scientific inquiry to elude unproductive debates such as the primacy of quantitative methods over qualitative and harness their powers whenever they are required by the goals of research. Consequently, it is perhaps unsurprising that mixed methods research has been argued as supported by pragmatism (see Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004, Johnson *et al.* 2007, Morgan 2007, Felizer 2010, Creswell 2015) and other innovative approaches that blur the lines between the method divide, such as fuzzy set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (see Garcés 2016b) as well.

In this context, how does pragmatism suggest the pertinence of design, strategy and method can be assessed and by whom? Although pragmatism is certainly a consequentialist philosophy, it does not advocate an «anything goes» attitude to inquiry and the production of evidence for public policy. After all, evidence produced in a questionable manner may yield expected results by coincidence or chance. This would hardly be acceptable either scientifically or practically. In this case, as above, warranted assertibility applies. The research theories, methods and techniques used in producing evidence ought to have proven their success in turning indeterminate situations into determinate ones. Different tools and instruments may be required in order to adequately tackle distinct questions and challenges. Their ability to do so is determined by their results. However, because they cannot speak for themselves, it is up to the different relevant epistemic communities to assess those results. The burden of the proof falls therefore on the inquirers. On the one hand, those producing evidence ought to be transparent regarding all the choices made and the justification for each. Whenever relevant this ought to include also even their personal characteristics, acknowledging how they affect data collection and analysis. The evidence ought to be evaluated under that light. On the other hand, those assessing the evidence ought to be transparent about all their biases and how they may affect their work. Their evaluation ought to be read and interpreted under that light. In this way, producing and using evidence becomes a rigorous activity characterized by clarity and explicitness. By so being, evidence can answer policy relevant questions: what works, when, and for whom? This would adhere to what Dewey

meant by the «scientific method», that is, «[...] the logic shared by the structure of all well conducted inquiries» (Levi 2004, p. 246).

6. Conclusions

Public policy is not only an academic exercise; it is intrinsically a practical one. Public policy is concerned with knowledge generation to the extent that it is useful to inform its implementation in order to maintain or change a state of affairs. The current plea for evidence-based policies brings information and the tools used to nurture policy making to the fore. Regardless of its goals, however, the importance of public policy can hardly be overstated as people's lives are affected by it directly or indirectly, in the short or in the long term. Certainly, this explains to a great extent why there is a growing interest in improving the evidence that nurtures policies. As urgent and necessary as that endeavor is, if it is going to fulfil its purpose of enhancing policy effectiveness, it is just as important to engage in it critically. In that effort, this essay provides a theoretical discussion, which is intrinsically as well as instrumentally relevant. It is intrinsically important because shedding light on the philosophy of science, the principles governing the out generation of knowledge, undergirding policy making is valuable in and of itself. It is instrumentally significant because, being logically prior to any discussion concerning methods and empirics, it provides the groundwork on which such elaborations can take place. To address both, in this paper pragmatism and a pragmatic public policy are proposed.

Pragmatism constitutes an alternative to the positivist orthodoxy as a philosophy of science on which to conduct social inquiry and policy relevant evidence. Pragmatism is guided by actual human experience and proposes a naturalistic approach that is focused on action and concerned with practical consequences. Put simply, while in positivism function follows form, in pragmatism form follows function. Consequently, for pragmatism, the quest for certainty or absolute, immutable and universal laws, as those believed to be found in nature, is an unfruitful exercise. Therefore, public policy based on evidence purporting to be just that is unlikely to deliver on its promises.

In lieu of a one-size-fits-all solution based on assumptions of constancy and homogeneity, policy making could embrace a pragmatic perspective that recognizes that the diversity of contexts and plurality of human experience can generate variety in policy outcomes. Further, since all action is constitutive of the world and the world is known from a specific

point of view, the actions of producing policy relevant evidence and assessing its pertinence makes up the world as well and are necessarily prejudiced perspectives. The implication for scientific knowledge generation in general and policy relevant evidence particularly are straightforward: explicit and transparent exposition and justification of all choices made, which entails all factors that may affect the findings, including when relevant the personal characteristics of the inquirer. This facilitates an adequate interpretation of the evidence, putting more reasonable boundaries on its breadth and depth, thereby increasing the effectiveness of policies inspired by it.

The argument in favor of pragmatism has been elaborated in contrast to the dominant approach; but, of course, this does not mean that there are no other alternatives. In fact, there is a relatively small but growing literature highlighting positivism's limitations and suggesting other options. Despite the merits of including those approaches, space constraints forbid, as they usually do, engaging in such an interesting discussion. Nonetheless, the text above has sought to hint to some connections between pragmatism and some of them, and some advantages of the former over the latter. In this sense, it might be helpful to address briefly the main alternative to positivism, to be found at its antipode, namely, interpretivism.

At the obvious risk of oversimplification, philosophically, it could be summarized by stating that it adheres to mind-world monism, rejecting thereby the idea of an objective world (Jackson 2011) and even that of reality itself. But it reaches the conclusion that, because of this, all that can be known are subjectivities or perceptions (Moses & Knutsen 2012, Hollis 1994). As a result, there is rejection of explanation and prediction, seeking instead understanding the meanings in each case or situation as virtually unique (Garcés forthcoming). Therefore, it focuses on language and its use. This is the reason why this approach favors qualitative methods, suggesting, as in the case of positivism, a predetermined design to produce knowledge. Further, in its most extreme versions, it gives up the world and it is considered that social reality is only linguistically constructed, regarding the natural as well as the social sciences as governed by discourses and power (Garcés forthcoming). Consequently, evidence would constitute another discourse with which power is being exerted by some over others, and thereby a tool which constitutes the world. Because of this, self-reflection is required from knowledge-producers or evidence-generators.

Under this perspective, pragmatism seems to share some characteristics, but also overcomes some limitations of interpretivism. As mentioned above, in pragmatism it is recognized that the mind is a part of the world, that all action performed in the world (including those by the mind) is constitutive of it, and that, thus, the world is always known from a prejudiced viewpoint. But, importantly, it recognizes the existence of that world. Accordingly, it acknowledges the importance of self-awareness and the explicitness of biases in the generation of evidence. Nevertheless, it does not fall into the shortcoming of limiting inquiry to a predetermined shape associated with a specific technique, *i.e.,* qualitative methods, since this, as in the case of positivism, is subordinating function to form. Instead, as stressed earlier, pragmatism is not attached to any one approach and, to the contrary, lets the purpose of inquiry guide the choice of theories, designs and techniques, favoring innovation and creativity. Exploring in depth this line of argument may be a fruitful avenue for further research.

Similarly, this discussion has other implications that could not be addressed justly in this paper. More broadly, it overlaps with discussions regarding scientific ethnocentrism, colonialism and modernity. More narrowly, it touches directly upon more tangible issues such as development cooperation, foreign aid evaluation, and the assessment of internationally financed programs. Certainly, elaborating on them in any detail goes beyond the purposes of this paper, but they constitute important research paths and ones that could be tackled rewardingly in a pragmatic fashion. Perhaps this essay leaves fertile grounds for such undertaking.

The argument put forward has focused on the dominant approach, positivism, and a final thought in practical terms seems warranted. Uncertainty is a hard pill to swallow in public policy. Policy-makers and politicians build their platforms on promises, on which they are expected to deliver by their constituents. Therefore, they need confidence in their explanations and certainty in their prediction; they need «the truth». After all, public opinion has little patience for or understanding of nuances. Perhaps, this has also contributed to the steadfast grip that public policy still has on positivism. Again, this should not discourage pragmatic inquiry. In fact, it should convey a sense of urgency in its practice and transmission. The expectation is that if pragmatism, as well as other approaches to inquiry, can be shared, employed and taught at different levels, that need for certitude and surety would be alleviated and perhaps redirected to more realistic and productive efforts. By so doing, policy-makers and politicians could be more realistic in

their promises, which would enhance their accountability, and the public would have a more educated and informed opinion to make better decisions. This places a great responsibility and pressure on the shoulders of academics. Hopefully this paper is a step forward in that direction.

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Chapter 4
From action to transaction: some implications of pragmatism and its concept of agency for development research and practice[34]
Capítulo 4
De la acción a la transacción: algunas implicaciones del pragmatismo y su concepto de agencia para la investigación y la práctica del desarrollo

Abstract

Development suggests the notion of 'good change' and its research and practice are about bringing it to fruition. Perhaps because of this emphasis on application, relatively less attention has been given to philosophical issues, despite the fact that shedding more light on the latter can contribute to the former. Positivism and, to a lesser extent, constructivism, with their advantages and disadvantages, have dominated the field. Against this conventional dichotomy, this article argues in favour of philosophical classic pragmatism as an alternative and does so employing philosophical ontology. From this perspective, pragmatism adheres to mind-world monism and phenomenalism. As such, it demands healthy awareness and criticism of preferences and biases, whether personal or contextual, in the self and in the subjects of interest. It entails a call for plurality, to harness practical reason to solve practical problems, turning indeterminate situations into determinate ones, thereby generating warranted assertions.

Keywords: pragmatism; agency; philosophical ontology; development

Resumen

El desarrollo sugiere la noción de 'buen cambio' y su estudio y práctica se concentran en materializarlo. Quizá debido a este énfasis en la aplicación, los aspectos filosóficos han recibido menor atención relativamente, a pesar de que iluminar estos puede contribuir a aquella. El positivismo y, en menor medida, el constructivismo, con sus ventajas y desventajas, han dominado el área. Contra esta dicotomía convencional, este artículo argumenta en favor del pragmatismo filosófico clásico como una alternativa y lo hace empleando la ontología filosófica. Desde esta perspectiva, el

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pragmatismo se suscribe al monismo mente-mundo y al fenomenalismo. Así, demanda una sana consciencia y crítica de las preferencias y sesgos, sean personales o contextuales, en uno mismo o en los sujetos de interés. Implica también un llamado a la pluralidad, para emplear la razón práctica en la resolución de problemas prácticos, volviendo situaciones indeterminadas en determinadas, generando de esta forma afirmaciones justificadas.

Palabras clave: pragmatismo, agencia, ontología filosófica, desarrollo

1. Introduction

The study of development is about applied or instrumental research (Mehta *et al.* 2006). Academics and practitioners, to different extents, have recognized this is the case to the extent that some, like Molteberg and Bergstrøm (2000, p. 7), have acknowledged that «knowledge generation is not an end in itself». Instead, the end is to contribute to generate what is regarded as «good change» in reality. Indeed, at its most basic, this is how «development» is defined (Chambers 2004). Whatever that is taken to mean, this aspiration highlights a tacit but virtually ubiquitous driving force behind the field, namely, a rather robust notion of agency.

This nature of «development», *i.e.,* accounting for and eliciting expected change, can be easily attested in the increasing interest in demonstrable «impact» that is demanded of both research and practice (Currie-Adler 2016). Funding and support for such efforts are at stake. Most importantly, people are at stake[35] (Alkire 2010). In this sense, their very agency has increasingly been recognized as intrinsically valuable (Alkire 2009). This highlights the ethical dimension inherent in the nature of development work.

Hence, questions of evaluation (normativity), belief (epistemology) and practice (action) are raised in discussing this field. However, relatively little deliberate attention has been given to the philosophical grounding supporting the practice-oriented character of development. The relevance of providing such basis for the conduct of inquiry and even the exercise of practice is twofold as it has intrinsic, as well as instrumental value. Shedding light on the philosophical ideas undergirding research and practice is valuable in and of itself. Additionally, given the influence this can have on the selection of theory and methods, such elucidation can contribute to carrying out empirical research more soundly.

The field of «development», reflecting social science more broadly, has been traditionally dominated by positivism and, to a lesser extent, critical studies (Currie-Adler 2016), which can be associated with some forms of constructivism. The great contributions of each philosophy of science notwithstanding, both appear to have limitations, and the strict

[35] Alkire (2010, p. 191) states: «The policies, practices, analyses, and measures that guide development institutions can be scrutinized to uncover which truly aim at human freedoms, and how true their aim might be [...]. By such inspection, the oversights of development theories might be uncovered and corrected. Such work is terribly salient, for lives are at stake. In development, Sen observes, "a misconceived theory can kill"».

adherence to either of them, often induced by epistemic and professional communities alike, may work against what is arguably the spirit of development, perhaps best captured in its scholarly discipline of development studies: «to improve people's lives» (Sumner 2006, p. 645).

Perhaps more importantly, despite their dominance, positivism, and constructivism, do no provide a comprehensive panorama of the philosophical landscape available for the social sciences (Chernoff 2007, Moses & Knutsen 2012, Jackson 2011).

Against this backdrop, it seems warranted to look for alternatives that better suit the nature of development research and practice, and this essay advances philosophical classic pragmatism as a promising one. This suggestion is certainly not new. Most recently, Garcés (in press), in this very forum, contributes in elaborating how public policy analysis can benefit from pragmatic insights. Epistemology takes centre stage in that discussion, which highlights the distinctness of pragmatism, *vis-à-vis* positivism, and its support of plurality.

This essay seeks to take the dialogue further widening the scope of comparison to other traditions, however briefly, and point to some promising implications of pragmatic development work. Against convention, which privileges scientific ontology, to make the case for pragmatism, an analysis from philosophical ontology is proposed. Whereas the former addresses «what is» or «what exists», leading to the ontology-epistemology-methods structure (well-known in the field of development, see Sumner & Tribe 2008a), the latter is concerned with the «hook up» that we have with the world. As such, philosophical ontology is logically prior to scientific ontology. Given that development studies provides fertile grounds for cross- disciplinary dialogue (Currie-Adler 2016, Sumner & Tribe 2008a), for this undertaking Jackson's (2011) seminal work in international relations is employed, as it provides a useful heuristic with which to analyse its philosophical wagers and its implications for inquiry.

Furthermore, given the practice-oriented nature of this discipline, which as mentioned above entails a notion of agency, whether in respect of the researcher/practitioner or the subjects of research/intervention, it seems pertinent to approach such discussion in terms of the notion of human agency.

Consequently, this article is divided into four sections, besides the introduction. The first presents the heuristic proposed for an adequate analysis from the philosophy of science, namely a philosophically ontological perspective. Pragmatism's characterization according to this framework and the pragmatic (trans)agent are elaborated in the second. The third section addresses some implications that pragmatic development work has for research and practice. The final section concludes.

2. Philosophical Ontology

Scholarly and practical work in development has been dominated by positivism and, to a lesser extent, constructivism. The search for causality and the pursuit of explication and prediction have proven pervasive since the second half of the twentieth century (Currie-Adler 2016). A critical movement accompanied these efforts in last decades from a constructivist philosophy of science, particularly the poststructuralist project (Sumner & Tribe 2008b). These reflect what is conventional construed as the antipodes in the spectrum of the philosophy of science (Della Porta & Keating 2008). Certainly, each tradition —in its own right— has provided great insights to the field of development. Much policy has been informed and interests behind it have been exposed from each camp, respectively.

At the same time, both have been subject to criticism. While positivism's quest for general laws (or anything close to it) has been strongly challenged (Sumner & Tribe 2008b), the usefulness of poststructuralism's critique to any and all knowledge claims as an exercise of domination has been questioned (Currie-Adler 2016). Nonetheless, these continue to be the main traditions undergirding development research and practice, each pursuing their own agenda and sticking to what they regard as their methods, techniques and strategies.

As this discussion suggests, addressing the philosophy of science can be useful in a twofold manner. Its intrinsic value lies in highlighting the assumptions and purposes in development efforts. Its instrumental value consists in the guide it provides for empirical inquiry. However, elaborating the argument in terms of that spectrum, as the literature has done thus far, seems rather restrictive, as it excludes important recent contributions (*e.g.,* most tellingly research with mix and multi methods designs).

In this sense, the argument elaborated here focuses on the philosophy of science but addresses what is arguably the most basic and abstract level of inquiry, namely, philosophical ontology, and sketches some implications for empirical exercises.

The difference with the conventional approach, better regarded as scientific ontology, is rather significant (Bhaskar 1975). *Scientific* ontology refers to the traditional study of «being» or «what exists in the world»; that is, it alludes to an archive or inventory of objects, processes or factors that a specific research expects to exist or of which it has evidence for its existence (Jackson 2011).

Instead, it is argued here a more useful point of departure is to take one step back and start from a *philosophical* ontology. This refers to the connection we have with the world or «to the conceptual and philosophical basis on which claims about the world are formulated in the first place: ontology as our "hook-up" to the world, so to speak, concerned with how we as researchers are able to produce knowledge in the first place» (Jackson 2011, p. 28). Beginning with the philosophy of science therefore is not only methodologically sound, as it guides research practices (Gorsky 2013), but also analytically advisable.

In this light, this approach challenges the traditional ontology-epistemology-methodology (understood as «methods») structure. This is not only an organizing sequence but a normative suggestion. As Jackson (2011) suggests, it implies the primacy of ontology (questions about *being* and what exists) over epistemology (questions about *knowing* and how can we formulate/evaluate statements about the world). As such, it also entails the primacy of philosophy of science over methods (the techniques used in order to gain knowledge about the object of study). Research strategies, therefore, depend on the world, meaning that «it is the nature of objects that determines their cognitive possibilities for us» (Bhaskar 1998, p. 25).

Although reasonable at first sight, the ontology-first position has the fundamental problem of assuming «what exists», what is the world made of. This is problematic, because challenges about ontological claims become implausible, such as the epistemological question on the validity of the claim or the method-related question as to which technique to use in order to assess the claim (Chernoff 2009). In this sense,

scientific ontology is logically (and necessarily), subsequent to philosophical ontology since sensible claims about what exists can only be made after having established the grounds on which they stand (Patomäki & Wight 2000). As can be gathered from the above, the ontology-first tradition refers to *scientific* ontology. Hence, this project seeks to avoid the pitfalls of convention placing *philosophical* ontology first.

2.1. A heuristic device: the knower-known and observation-knowledge relationships

In this context, a practical categorization of philosophical ontology principles seems useful. However, the philosophy of science jury is still out on the issue of the most important, fundamental or useful positions concerning philosophical ontologies. There is no all- encompassing classification either, but neither is it needed. As Jackson (2011) suggests, what is necessary is a functional criterion; that is, to establish categories that allow: *i)* identifying the disagreements between different perspectives and positions in the philosophy of science, and *ii)* comparing them so as to elucidate the consequences of adopting any. A heuristic device on this basis would enable the study of different approaches on clear and similar criteria, which seems necessary in order to justify the selection of any.

Perhaps, the most developed work in this regard has been elaborated by Jackson (2011) which, as he suspects, extends to social science broadly. Thus, the present discussion relies on his seminal contribution[36]. He identifies two philosophically ontological wagers: *i)* the relationship between the researcher and the world to be researched, or the relationship between the mind and the world, and *ii)* the nature of knowable entities or the relationship between observation and knowledge. Each is a spectrum the extremes of which depict ideal typical states.

First, the relationship between the mind and the world (also referred as the mind and the body) entails, on the one hand, *mind-world dualism* and, on the other, *mind-world monism*. Mind-world dualism is the stance supporting that there is a world «out there», independent of the knower, that can be known as it is. Since objectivity lies in that world, objective knowledge is possible. The task of research is, therefore, to bridge the gap

[36] In employing this approach, this project is cautious to subscribe to Humphreys' (2013) contribution, by regarding Jackson's contribution as a heuristic rather than a typology.

between the mind and the world. Philosophically, ever since the introduction of this separation by Descartes, this has been the task of epistemology (Taylor 1995). Mind-world monism, contrastingly, sees no separation between the researcher and the researched world. Accordingly, the knower is part of the world. Knowledge, then, is not about elaborating accurate descriptions of an already-existing world. It is nonsensical to talk about «the world» as separated from the activities of making sense of it.

The relationship between knowledge and observation, in turn, offers two positions: *phenomenalism* and *transfactualism*. Phenomenalism describes the stance that knowledge claims are purely related to human experience. This ought not to be confused with empiricism, which posits that only the «naked» senses (solely sensual perception) matter. Instead, phenomenalism adopts an enlarged notion of experience in order to include «mediated observation» as well, *i.e.,* the use of different types of artefacts in order to enhance sensory perception. As such, it can be considered an extension of empiricism. Transfactualism, in turn, holds that knowledge can go beyond experienced facts (and hence its denomination) to apprehend processes and factors that generate those facts (Wight 2006). In other words, this position entails the possibility of transcending experience and thereby of knowing in-principle unobservable things (Bhaskar 1975).

The conjunction of these commitments provides four philosophies of science, approaches to inquiry (Jackson 2011) (see Table 1). At the conjunction of mind-world dualism and phenomenalism can be found the most widely used approach, namely *neopositivism*. The framework that combines mind-world dualism with transfactualism is *critical realism*. *Analyticism* is at the crossroads of mind-world monism and phenomenalism. Finally, mind-world monism and transfactualism underpin *reflexivity*. This typology is ideal-typical (in the Weberian sense)[37], and therefore, it does not depict a reality, but rather exposes, in a simplified manner, relevant commitments that are elusive, implicit or unclear nowadays.

[37] «Instead of a representation or a depiction, it is a deliberate over-simplification of a complex empirical actuality for the purpose of highlighting certain themes or aspects that are never as clear in the actual world as they are in the ideal-typical depiction of it» (Weber in Jackson 2011, p. 37).

Table 1. Jackson's (2011) matrix of philosophical ontological wagers and the methodologies resulting from their combination

		Relationship between the knower and the known	
		Mind-world dualism	Mind-world monism
Relationship between knowledge and observation	Phenomenalism	Neopositivism	Analyticism
	Transfactualism	Critical Realism	Reflexivity

Source: Jackson (2011)
Elaboration: author

As is argued below, pragmatism is best placed within analyticist wagers. Therefore, for current purposes and due to space limitations, only this approach is briefly introduced to provide a description of its main features. The argument elaborating how pragmatism fits within it is developed in the next section.

2.2. Analyticism

The combination of mind-world monism and phenomenalism produces analyticism. Mind-world monism posits that the mind is interwoven with the world in a constitutive manner, that the knower is part of the known, and vice versa. In other words, the researcher is constitutive of the world. Therefore, the activities carried out to research the latter are themselves the world, as they are producing it. Contra dualists, for monists, the «world» does not refer to a stockpile of things but to an array of facts. The objects with which scientific inquiry is concerned are not meaningless entities susceptible to our senses but are always and already intertwined with intentional (our interests) and conceptual (our theories and creativity) content.

Phenomenalism, in turn, posits that knowledge claims are limited to what can be experienced, either directly or indirectly. At the same time this does not mean, that

analyticists cannot use propositions about in-principle undetectables such as powers and properties, as long as they are used *instrumentally* to explain observed phenomena; *i.e.,* as long as they are used to explain manifest action and with out any ontological commitments about their reality.

3. Pragmatism as analyticist

Pragmatism has been defined in different ways. It has been regarded as a theory of meaning and a theory of knowledge (Quinton 2010); it has been considered a «living philosophy» (Talisse & Aikin 2011), and has been described as an account of «how we think» (Menand 1997). The literature points to at least two types of pragmatism: classic and neopragmatism[38]. The differences can be quite relevant for this discussion (see, *e.g.,* Pihlström 2013, Hildebrand 2003, Kloppenberg 1999, Menand 1997); therefore, in this paper, pragmatism refers to *classic* pragmatism[39].

At its most basic level, it departs from «acting», not from «things» (the world) or form «reason» (the mind), thereby preventing false starts (Kratochwil 2011). It is a consequentialist perspective, for which knowledge production is relevant «[p]rimarily, persistingly and essentially for the sake of action» (Quinton 2010, p. 3). Influenced by Charles Darwin, pragmatism's approach to action focused on accounting for change not absolutes (Dewey 1931). The implications were twofold: the account of social change and, more importantly, the role of science and philosophy in generating change.

Regarding social change, it is the product of action and action is the relationship between human beings and their environment. Beyond action, this relationship was considered a *transaction*. This proposal rejected the conventional notions of self-action and inter-action since the former, dominant in sociology, entailed that things act by their own powers and the latter, influential in economics, suggests that things are balanced against each other as in causal relations (Smith 2004). In both, the common denominator is that the units composing them comes to the foreground. Transaction challenges the idea that elements composing a system can somehow be separated from it, as if there were discontinuities in the world. Instead, it recognizes the continuity existing between humans

[38] For a slightly different but also relevant distinction, see Misak (2007).
[39] For the purposes of this paper, the argument mainly focuses on the works of John Dewey and George Herbert Mead since, although building on the insights of those before them, they developed the pragmatist understanding of agency most directly (see Carle 2005).

and their context. In other words, transaction highlights that this relationship is one indivisible unit. Moreover, this relationship is described as organism-environment so as not to suggest any metaphysical primacy of either.

For the generation of knowledge, transaction means there is no separation between the mind and the world. The result is a rejection of the correspondence theory of truth and incorporating meaning into knowledge claims (Sidorsky 1977). Accordingly, pragmatism moves away from the positivist aspiration of «lifting the veil» of reality, identifying fact, regarded as objective truths, thereby getting to know the world as it is. Dewey (1931, p. 11) stated:

> Because we are afraid of speculative ideas, we do, and do over and over again, an immense amount of dead, specialized work in the region of «facts». We forget that such facts are only data; that is, are only fragmentary, uncompleted meanings, and unless they are rounded out into complete ideas —a work which can only be done by hypothesis, by a free imagination of intellectual possibilities— they are as helpless as are all maimed things and as repellent as are needlessly thwarted ones.

Apropos of the role of science and philosophy in change, it is related to the pragmatic approach to knowledge. Dewey referred to it as *instrumental,* concerned with the resolution of social problems. That is, research practices can and should generate change. «Dewey sought to demonstrate that an instrumental concept of truth explained how knowledge could effect social change while other theories of truth held by rationalists or empiricists could only make this a miracle or mystery» (Sidorsky 1977, p. xliv). Beyond the sciences, this project pertained philosophy as well. Therefore, Dewey (1931, p. 8) asserted: «But philosophy is not just a passive reflex of civilization that persists through changes, and that changes while persisting. It is itself a change; the patterns formed in this junction of the new and the old are prophecies rather than records; they are policies, attempts to forestall subsequent developments».

In other words, by accounting for action, social change can be scrutinized. Moreover, since that scrutiny itself is action, it is also producing change. This is particularly evident when that scrutiny seeks to induce change, as development work and practice do.

To fix ideas, the notions of *doubt, belief, habit* and *inquiry* become relevant when discussing action. Peirce (1878) defined doubt as a state of uneasiness and dissatisfaction generated by a situation in which there is uncertainty about how to proceed, how to act. Action has been somehow hindered, and this causes unsureness and hesitation. Dewey (1938) refereed to such a situation as indeterminate. It is so because it is not clear which course of action is adequate, convenient or pertinent and, hence, action has stopped.

Belief, for Peirce (1878), describes the opposite state, one in which action is constant and uninterrupted. This is a state of calm and satisfaction that dissolves doubt since it is one on which action can be confidently furthered. Such a state is the product of knowledge, of knowing what to do.

Habit, in turn, is made of acts and indicates an aggregation of acts structuring experience. In this sense, contrary to common wisdom, a habit does not solely denote repeated acts. It refers to «an acquired predisposition to *ways* or modes of response, not to particular acts» (Dewey in Hildebrand 2008, p. 25; emphasis in the original); that is, habits are tendencies or dispositions and as such are subject to change.

Both, doubt and belief, promote action but in different ways. Whereas belief guides desires and action, under certain circumstances, doubt prompts action to overcome doubt itself; this action is the struggle to attain belief and can be considered *inquiry* (Peirce 1878).

Consequently, the attainment of belief, and ultimately habits of action, is the sole function of inquiry (Peirce 1878). Once this is achieved, and action can be furthered anew, the situation becomes determinate (Dewey 1938). When this point is reached, according to Dewey, no claim of truth is made, as that would establish an absolute. Not even label of knowledge is adopted (Bacon 2012). Instead, assertions depicting this outcome are deemed «warranted». Warrantedly, assertible propositions are in this sense, and following Dewey's (1931) project for philosophy, at the same time modest and bold.

Therefore, pragmatism regards inquiry as transaction, a process by which humans engage with their environment, through manipulation, whenever action has been hindered, to remove the obstacle, until they are able to further action again.

3.1. Pragmatic Agency: the transaction of self and society

Describing and elaborating on the pragmatic notion of agency is rather challenging, because the pragmatists did not advance a fully developed theory of the self (Wiley 2008). Plausibly, the most elaborated account is provided by John Dewey and George Herbert Mead[40]. Drawing from Darwin, Dewey proposed a theory of the self that was organic, in which the human being is not separated between mind and body, but is characterized as one, a body-mind organism (Dewey 1958) that is not static but emergent, inasmuch as it is constructed by virtue of the circumstances or conditions surrounding it, which means that there is an element of contingency in it. In fact, rejecting Cartesian dualism and the separation of the mind (human consciousness) from the world (nature), he preferred the notions of «organism» and «environment», so as to stress that neither is conceptually prior to the other, since they give continued meaning to each other. Further, environment signifies the totality of connotations it has, *inter alia,* social, cultural, emotional, intellectual, physical, ecological, which are only analytically differentiated but exist within a single situation. There is, therefore, a continuity between the human being and nature.

Consequently, neither the self nor society have metaphysical primacy. Against individualism, individuals have no existence prior to or separate from society and its traditions and institutions. Similarly, contra structuralists and post-structuralists, although society influences individuals, it does not determine the selves, which incidentally do exist, in body and in personality.

3.2. Habits, selves and action

In order to account for the dynamics between self and social context the pragmatic notion of habit can be useful. Dewey (1930, p. 125) states that «[m]an is a creature of habit, not of reason nor yet of instinct». Against the reflex-arc wisdom, habit is more than conditioned response. Habits entail ways of realizing desires via intelligent action. Dewey privileges habits (as predispositions formed by several acts) for they are more intimate, informative and fundamental about human beings than conscious choices[41]. Habits, from

[40] As it happens, Dewey's take on these issues developed throughout his work. Therefore, in this paper, his middle and late contributions are utilized. Complementing and building upon it, the work of George Herbert Mead is also revised since it is not only pragmatic, but Dewey explicitly endorsed it (Wiley 2008).

[41] Dewey (1930, p. 176) asserts «habits formed in process of exercising biological aptitudes are the sole agents of observation, recollection, foresight and judgment: a mind or consciousness or soul in general

the most mundane to the most skillful activities, are what makes much of experience intelligible. He states that:

> [a]ll habits are demands for certain kinds of activities; and they constitute the self. In any intelligible sense of the word will, they *are* will. They form our effective desires and they furnish us with our working capacities. They rule our thoughts, determining which shall appear and be strong and which shall pass from light into obscurity (Dewey 1930, p. 25; emphasis in original).

In making sense of experience, habits contribute to preference formation and capacity development, which creates individuals' demands, as well as somewhat stable possibilities of responding to those stimuli; that is, what one desires and feels capable of is the product of habits. The exercise of freedom, for instance, hinges upon this since «freedom depends on skill and skill on habit» (Hollis 2010, p. 39).

Habits change mainly due to the frustration of habit or conflict among habits. In both cases, when habits are not expressed, they give way to ideas or incite impulses, which work to change the environment or choose from competing habits. This situation calls for an internal deliberation in order to further action anew.

3.3. Pragmatic agency: the "self" in "action"

A more detailed account of the (aforementioned) internal deliberation, and the development of the self, is offered by George Herbert Mead. He subscribed to Dewey's notion of habit[42] and complemented it (Baldwin 1988). In true pragmatic fashion, the point of departure is action or the act. For Mead, acts are always social. Individual and social facts cannot be reduced to one another since they are constructed simultaneously. «For Mead, functional interrelations among individuals, not a priori social facts, are primary» (Johnson & Shifflett 1981, p. 146).

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which performs these operations is a myth». And he continues: «Concrete habits do all the perceiving, recognizing, imagining, recalling, judging, conceiving and reasoning that is done. "Consciousness", whether as a stream or as special sensations and images, expresses functions of habits, phenomena of their formation, operation, their interruption and reorganization» (Dewey 1930, p. 177).

[42] «Reflective thinking arises [...] for carrying out some hypothetical way of continuing an action which has been checked. Lying back of curiosity there is always some activity, some action, that is for the time being checked [...]. The solution of the problem will be some way of acting that enables one to carry on the activity which has been checked in relation to the new act which has arisen» (Mead in Kilpinen 2012, p. 59).

What is more, human group life is social interaction. Group life is people's acting itself. This can be analytically described as an interactive process, composed of *i)* indication, *ii)* interpretation, *iii)* formulation of response, and *iv)* action. Indication refers to the meaningful (verbal and non-verbal) gestures individuals transmit to one another (Blumer 2004). Interpretation is the attribution of meaning given to those gestures. Formulation of response denotes the activity of devising a specific course of action. This is particularly evident when there is a discrepancy between the meaning conveyed in indication and the meaning generated in interpretation. Action is the product of interpretation and the overt response to indication, which becomes indication itself.

This insight has implications for action as well as meaning. Regarding action, it is seen as self-directed, not evoked by stimuli. Meaning, in turn, is not a psychic product added to a gesture or a gesture's given characteristic but is conceived of as the future action entailed by the gesture. Consequently, pragmatic agency has an inherent and explicit interpretive element, and it is evidenced in action.

3.4. Objects, meaning and action

Purposive human action, for Mead, is oriented toward «objects», understood as anything that the individual notices, refers to or designates (Blumer 2004). Hence, objects can be material and/or immaterial, from within and/or without the individual's body, real and/or imaginary, etc. Put simply, if the individual is aware of it, it is an object for that individual. This awareness is not generated in a vacuum but in social interaction. Others around us draw our attention to different elements in our environment, making them objects to us as well. Likewise, it is through the indication generated by their acting towards those objects that we learn how to act towards them, by «role-taking», thereby providing them with meaning. Therefore, the meaning of objects is constructed socially. Hence, all objects are social products.

Further, the meanings of objects constitute the nature of the object for the individual. The motives, interests, objectives, attachments, commitments, and designs of action they may entail are factored in those meanings. As such, objects constitute the world or environment within which human beings operate (Mead 1972). Consequently, an object

presupposes a subject and human action is to be studied in terms of the objects that make up an individual or a group's world and towards which they act.

Importantly, since objects are everything of which an individual is aware, the self can be an object as well. At its most basic, the self is the object that the individual is to themselves[43]. Self-interaction is based on social interaction, because the latter enables performing role- taking. It is by assuming the position of others that individuals can treat themselves as objects. The multiplicity of interactions (and thereby of others) permits the production of a «generalized other», that goes beyond specific social roles and adopts a more abstract character. Regarding the self as an object, thus, enables importing the communicative process (by which relationships among humans are characterized) to the internal sphere.

By the same token, by enabling internal interaction (indicating something to oneself, interpreting it, formulating action, and acting), the self can also be regarded as a process. This is a fluid one in which the human organism is acting (denoted as the «I»), and whose action is being reflected upon (denoted as the «Me»). While the «I» can be understood as the disposition of the organism to act, the expression of an impulse, the «Me» can be considered the view of the generalized other (Mead 1972). «The "I" is the source of spontaneity and innovative actions. The "Me" is the vehicle of self-regulation and social control» (Baldwin 1988, p. 117).

3.5. Between unreflective and reflective acts

For pragmatism, therefore, human action occurs in two basic forms: as habitual and as creative acts (Joas 1996). Habit is the most basic resource of action that allows this continuous process. At different moments, the latter can be challenged, and then conscious, reflective or creative action is resorted to in order to further the process. In this sense, all action requires thought, but different actions demand different levels of reflection. Moreover, reflective action needs habitual action as a basis to build upon or as a background. As Dewey stated, «thought which does not exist within ordinary habits lacks means of execution» (1930, p. 67).

[43] This resonates with Taylor (1985, pp. 15-16), who states: «But what is distinctively human is the power to evaluate our desires, regard some as desirable and others are undesirable. This is why "no animal other than man" [...] appears to have the capacity for reflective self-evaluation that is manifested in the formation of second-order desires».

Further, habits could be regarded as objects. Habits are constitutive of a person's self and as such they are a part of a person's world. While people might not be aware of some habits, the latter are recognizable, acquiring thereby meaning and inducing action. Indeed, in principle, habits are open to the person's reflection, even while they are being performed (Kilpinen 2012). The corollary, hence, is that by looking at the habits and the objects (some habits included) that make up a person's world an account of pragmatic agency can be provided.

3.6. The pragmatic transagent

For pragmatism, therefore, human beings are intelligent, reflective, diversely motivated organisms of habit that can be studied in terms of their objects; that is, they are transagents. They are intelligent, because they are forward-looking in their examination of the objects of their experience; that is, their scrutiny of the relations, connections and causes of their ideas and values is carried out with the future consequences of them in sight. By so doing, ultimately, the aim is to control the inevitable change in the world. They are reflective because they are capable of see themselves as objects of scrutiny. In that examination they can question their motivations, which can be other than self-regarding ones. They are organisms, because their relationship with their context is such that they constitute one unit with their environments. In this unit, they are constantly and mutually changing each other. They are creatures of habit because, being predispositions for action, they are akin to deeply internalized beliefs on which all action, whether conscious or not, is based. As such, they are more intimate and informative than choices. Finally, their transagency can be studied in terms of their objects because the latter constitute their world. They solely act upon that which is an object for them. If it is not an object, it does not exist for them.

4. Pragmatism, social science and development

Philosophical pragmatism is essentially a consequentialist and action-oriented philosophy. Perhaps because of this, it has been commonly associated with a relativist focus on «whatever works». However, as the discussion thus far has sought to show, pragmatism entails profound and complex implications for the conduct of inquiry in development studies and its practice in development policy and programs.

As an analyticist methodology, pragmatism rejects mind-world (or mind-body) dualism and instead adheres to monism. This is a recognition that the knower is constitutive of the known, and the latter can only be known as it is perceived by the former. In this transaction, the knower is also constituted by the known since, at its most basic, it becomes an object for the knower and thus the knower cannot be the same as before that occurrence. Similarly, pragmatism subscribes to phenomenalism, which entails a commitment to experience. However, this is not the same as empiricism's exclusive reliance on sensory experience. Without an ontological commitment to the existence of non-sensory perceivable entities, pragmatism can incorporate them functionally in the understanding and explanation of a phenomenon.[44]

> Dewey's move is not to embrace either realism or idealism but to undercut them by describing a vision of knowledge and reality that most adequately expresses experience as it is lived. This approach preserves some intuitions found in both realism and idealism, but it also rejects many of their central premises (Hildebrand 2003, p. 86).

Why does this matter? To paraphrase Sheppard (in Hardy 2016, p. 773), writing apropos of another practice-oriented discipline: «Interesting as they may be, [philosophy of science] issues lack relevance or utility [...] unless they have practical utility, thus pushing [...] researchers to generate knowledge which is practically useful within "the practice paradigm"». This is precisely the spirit of pragmatism: to engage with practical concerns and put philosophy at the service of furthering human action.

Development work is characterized by being application-oriented; that is, it seeks to get an effect on the world, and this entails a robust notion of agency. There is a growing accord that these efforts ought to be directed towards the betterment of people's lives (Sumner & Tribe 2008b), which entails recognizing and enhancing their agencies (Alkire 2009). This is even more so whenever the increasingly influential capability approach is employed (Sen 1999). Therefore, providing an adequate account of human beings and their agency

[44] This phrasing is purposeful. It is meant to include the Weberian division between *erklären* («explaining») and *verstehen* («understanding») in social science, associated with positivism and reflexivity, respectively. Additionally, the «and» instead of «or» is also deliberate in order to highlight the analyticist position that challenges such dichotomy.

can hardly be overstated. In this sense, the implications for the research and practice of development are meaningful.

4.1. Pragmatism and development practice

For the practice of development, one implication is that, when formulating, implementing or evaluating programs and policies, it is important to factor in people's agency. Pragmatism recognizes that human beings, in different degrees and to different extents, enjoy agency. Therefore, contra paternalistic perspectives, to acknowledge it is to acknowledge their humanity. Hence, this is not only normatively adequate but empirically sound.

In the field, when dealing with subjects, the import of pragmatism can prove useful as well. Practitioners are likely to face challenging situations that hinder action, defy conventional knowledge or, in pragmatic terms, question belief. These situations create doubt and induce the search for potential solutions or inquiry. When doing so, pragmatism's advice is twofold. First, it may be helpful to regard subjects as deeply intertwined with their contexts, current and previous, social, cultural, geographical, etc. As argued above, this means understanding their behaviour in terms of the objects and habits that constitute their world and themselves.

Second, from a pragmatic perspective, practitioners are agents themselves. This means that they are constituted by objects and habits that make everything and anything intelligible to them. Often, because of some of them, they expect (and are expected) to be able to provide objective solutions and demonstrate impact in the real world (Currie-Adler 2016). However, as this paper has sought to argue, agents act according to purposes and this means that their action, has an inherent interpretive or subjective element in it, because it entails meaning (Alkire 2009). For pragmatism, this is not problematic to the extent practitioners show critical awareness that they are agents as well and that they approach the world, and the subject with whom they work, with their prejudices. Therefore, pragmatically speaking, anxieties regarding the lack of objectivity may be put to rest.

4.2. Pragmatism and development research

For development research, as the case of practitioners, the implication is bipartite. On the one hand, subjects ought to be regarded as a complex tapestry, consisting of both personal characteristics, as well as those of their context. This means that in order to understand a subject it is necessary to understand both their physical features as well as their history, environments, surroundings, etc. This may not seem an insight since, at first glance, it appears consistent with one of the most dominant approaches in the field, namely, Sen's capability approach (see Sen 1999, 1985).

However, the latter still is heavily focused on choice, *i.e.,* it seems to regard people as choosers (Gasper 2000). This is perhaps understandable given the approach's lineage in economics, the latter's roots in positivism (Caldwell 1994, Garcés in press), and its preference for what is observable. Pragmatism, in turn, goes further. It regards habits and objects as more intimate and, therefore, more informative than choice. By so doing, it provides a richer account of human experience.

Consequently, in practical terms, for pragmatism, incorporating a subject's agency into the analysis means scrutinizing the objects and habits that make up their world and themselves. Certainly, this applies to practitioners themselves as well.

On the other hand, researchers are agents themselves, constituting the world with their research practices and being constituted by it. As such, they do not approach the world from a non-prejudiced position; that is, claims to objective knowledge, absolute truth and certainty, *i.e.,* the positivist agenda, are not possible. Quite the contrary, they study subjects by dint of, and in fact thanks to, their intentions, preferences and desires, and the results of their research necessarily so reflect. Consequently, pragmatic development research entails a commitment with transparency regarding these influences and due acknowledgement of them in their work. As in the case of practitioners, this liberates researchers from claims of objectivity since approaching a mind-independent, *i.e.,* objective, world is nonsensical. All knowledge claims, therefore, are cautiously preliminary, not because they are underdetermined by the evidence, but because no amount of evidence could ever suffice to reach objectivity, since it is necessarily interpreted by the researcher.

4.3. Explaining, understanding and cross-fertilization

Pragmatism has the potential to contribute to the rigorousness with which development inquiry and interventions are conducted, satisfying thereby the interest in both in explaining as well as understanding. The incorporation of relevant habits and objects of both the researcher/practitioner and the subjects of research/intervention can enrich development work improving its explanatory and predictive power, an increasing interest of stakeholders, particularly of those funding such initiatives (Currie-Adler 2016). Certainly, such efforts are better suited for smaller scale projects, since taking into consideration additional information from all participants involved (*e.g.,* reasons, motivations, meanings…) and their contexts is resource demanding. Expectations of causality, therefore, may have to be adjusted from general to conjunctural. Interestingly, there has been a recognition in development work that such approach may prove more rewarding and a tendency in that direction has emerged in recent years (Sumner & Tribe 2008b).

Pragmatism can also accommodate the interests of those concerned with meaning, interpretation and critical inquiry. Since development work is transaction, the relevant meanings (in terms of action) of those involved in the process ought to be accounted for. This is inherent to any pragmatic endeavour. Moreover, the recognition that the world is constituted by development activities (whether research or practice), which is what development is all about, demands the explicit and adequate treatment of the effects of development scholars/professionals and their work on subjects as well as the effects of the latter on the former. Furthermore, since much of these activities are also directed (in some cases exclusively) to wider audiences, *i.e.,* policy makers, funding agencies, academic communities, pragmatism also entails cognizance of how those undertakings are constituting the wider world. This is a call for reflexivity.

How to carry out such research and practice empirically? Pragmatism does not endorse the exclusive use of any given method or technique and in fact it challenges such propositions. Pragmatic development research and practice entails a call for *i)* fallibility, to move beyond the quest for truth, ridding ourselves from the Cartesian anxiety (Bernstein 1983), and to acknowledge that warranted assertions or solutions (knowledge claims) are necessarily conjunctural, and *ii)* plurality, to harness the insights from

different disciplines and fields in creative, purposive and constructive dialogue in order to generate viable solutions, to the best of our knowledge and ability.

The purposes of inquiry dictate the strategy to be used. In some cases, this may mean a reliance on methods and techniques associated mostly to positivist research; in others, it may entail using strategies mostly used in constructivist inquiry; in others still, it may demand a combination of both via mix- or multi-methods designs. «[...] conceptions, theories and systems of thought [...] are tools. As in the case of all tools, their value resides not in themselves but in their capacity to work shown in the consequences of their use» (Dewey 1985, p. 163). In other words, for pragmatism, «form follows function» (Garcés in press). What is needed is, at the very least, a recognition that research methods and techniques are not the patrimony of a philosophy of science, *i.e.,* «methods» do not equal «methodology», the explicit and critical awareness of the preferences and biases of those involved, and because of the latter, that warranted assertions settle issues only temporarily.

This cross-disciplinary character has been and continues to be one of the main advantages of the field of development (Currie-Adler 2016). As such, pragmatism can contribute to make development a space for mutual learning and cross-fertilization. Not only the field can gain from this but each of its contributing disciplines. As Harriss (2002, p. 494) suggested: «"Discipline" in research is productive [...]. But equally it is extremely important that academic disciplines, or the particular "sets of rules" that predominate within any one of them [...] are subject to critical scrutiny from other approaches [...]. [T]here is a sense in which "disciplines" need to be saved from themselves».

4.4. Values, and ethics

Much like warranted assertions, normativity and values become beliefs that enable action. As such, they are ubiquitous to human experience (Putnam 2002). Despite positivist efforts to pursue certainty and objectivity, believing it is separable from normativity (see Garcés 2016, Caldwell 1994), not even science can scape the fact-value unity. While value is not equated with ethics, science has values, «epistemic» ones (Putnam 2002):

> These pragmatist philosophers did not refer only to the kind of normative judgments that we call «moral» or «ethical»; judgments of «coherence»,

> «simplicity», «plausibility», «reasonableness», and of what Dirac famously called the beauty of a hypothesis, are all normative judgments in Charles Peirce's sense, judgments of «what ought to be» in the case of reasoning (Putnam 2002, p. 31).

Such epistemic notions do not have distinct factual and evaluative parts (Putnam 2002). They are inherently normative, framed within a specific context of evaluation (Bacon 2012). Accordingly, they have been subject to change over time. An example is the confirmation- verification-falsification movement in positivism (see Caldwell 1994).

That norms and values have a provisional character applies to social norms and ethics, just as it applies to scientific ones. Indeed, indeterminate situations can ensue because values and norms loose validity. In such events inquiry is necessary to adjust them, as well as to facilitate action again.

Therefore, although development suggest the idea of positive change, pragmatic development work does not prescribe what that «positive» may be. That is not the normativity question that it seeks to address. Pragmatism is wary of absolutes (Menand 1997) and, therefore, neither does it offer an answer, nor does it believe that only one can be provided. Instead, what is «good change» is necessarily conjunctural. How is the decision to be made and by whom? As the discussion thus far has sought to highlight, pragmatism stresses action as necessarily social. Transagency entails that human beings generate the meanings of the objects and habits of which they are constituted by transacting with each other. Therefore, what is regarded as an indeterminate situation, *i.e.,* a hindrance to action, is decided as part of the dynamic process that is that transaction. The same applies to ways in which that hindrance is solved or the attempts to turn that situation into a determinate one. Further, what is considered as a determinate situation itself and, thus, what warranted assertions are, is also subject to that transaction. Hence, this transaction is inquiry, and inquiry is transaction. Put simply, what is to be changed, what is «good change» and how to get from the former to the latter, is a matter left to the public sphere.

Pragmatism is committed to democracy (Dewey 2001, Menand 1997). The public, all stakeholders, exercising their transagency, transact and should transact, in order to bring about the desired change, or not, and in the manner that they deem desirable, if so. Since in this process people become constitutive of each other and, therefore, we affect one

another, pragmatism calls not only for explicit awareness of our biases but of critical cognizance of them. Challenging our own motivations, interests, values, customs, and traditions is as important, if not more, as questioning those of others. Consequently, pragmatic development research and practice can assuage, to a certainty extent, concerns regarding the ethical grounds on which development work stands.

5. Conclusions

Development not only entails «change» but «good change» (Chambers 2004) and, as Beland and Cox (in Currie-Adler 2016, p. 9) state, «what things change and how they change are all the result of what people choose to do [...]. [T]hese choices are shaped by the ideas people hold and debate». Given its applied or instrumental nature, development work raises questions regarding normativity, belief and action. This article has argued that the field of development could provide some answers by incorporating the insights of philosophical classic pragmatism.

Pragmatism is a living philosophy that offers an account of how we think and act. In fact, according to the discussion above, it is perhaps better described as offering an account of how we act since, for pragmatism, thinking is just another form of action. Placing action at the locus of attention, pragmatism adheres to a consequentialist, naturalistic and pluralist framework that privileges practical concerns, avoiding thereby the pitfalls of rationalism and empiricism. Because of this, it has been deemed pertinent to study human action or agency from the philosophy of science in order to flesh out the implications of pragmatism has for development research and practice.

Instead of the conventional *scientific* ontology-first approach, this article has argued in favour of taking one step further back and departing from a *philosophical* ontology, which focuses on the grasp we have on the world. For that undertaking Jackson's (2011) proposal has proven useful. It entails placing philosophical wagers along two continua: *i)* the relationship between the knower and the known, which establishes mind-world monism and dualism, and *ii)* the nature of knowable entities or the relationship between observation and knowledge, which produces transfactualism and phenomenalism. The result is four quadrants showing all possible combinations as ideal typical methodologies. Employing this heuristic, pragmatism has been shown to coincide with analyticism, the methodology subscribing to mind-world monism and phenomenalism.

Therefore, from a pragmatic point of view, human agency is perhaps best understood as *transagency*. This is because this philosophy regards the organism and the environment as one unit engaged in transaction, a simultaneous complex process of mutual exchange in which both become constitutive of each other. Therefore, neither the unidirectional concept of action and agency nor the bidirectional «taking turns» notion of interaction or what could be called «interagency» seem to apply. Humans further their action by dint of habits, which are acquired predispositions to act that structure experience. In this sense, habits represent beliefs, or internalized notions on which we are prepared to act. Whenever there is a hindrance to action, we face an indeterminate situation, causing doubt as to how to proceed. This prompts inquiry, the process of trying out different hypotheses until action can be furthered anew, creating thereby a determinate situation. In this process, we engage with that which exists for us, namely objects. Habits and objects are constitutive of humans. This recognition enables a wide range of possibilities for pragmatic inquiry and work, depending on the exercise. Highlighting these features makes pragmatism more tractable, elucidating thereby why «Dewey's pragmatism cannot be assimilated to either traditional realism or idealism» (Hildebrand 2003, p. 75). More specifically, that human beings are transagents means that they are intelligent, reflective, diversely motivated organisms of habit that can be studied in terms of their objects.

More specifically, that human beings are transagents means that they are intelligent, reflective, diversely motivated organisms of habit that can be studied in terms of their objects. Their intelligence is demonstrated in their capacity to infer the future consequences of their ideas, values, and actions against the objects of their experience, as an attempt to control the inevitable and constant change within the world. That is, they are forward-looking. Their reflexivity is shown in their capability to regard themselves as objects and, thus, entities that can subjected to scrutiny and be acted upon. As such, their own values, preferences, reasons, and motivations (whether other or self-regarding) can be critically examined. They are organisms in the sense that they are one and the same with their environment, suggesting no metaphysical primacy of any above the other. In this sense, organism and environment is one indivisible unit in which both are constantly changing and constituting each other. They are creatures of habit because these are predispositions for action. As such, they internalize belief, which undergirds all action, conscious or not. Hence, habits are more informative and intimate than choices. Humans, thus, are *habiters* rather than choosers. Lastly, because their worlds are made of all that

which is an object for them, and those objects are defined in terms of action, their transagency can be studied in terms of those objects.

As above, the implications for development research and practice have also been sketched out. Pragmatism's focus on action, consequences and practical matters already resonates deeply with the spirit of development. Pragmatic development practice regards humans as agents, with different levels of agency. Moreover, their agency can be understood by the habits and objects making up their worlds. For development practitioners, therefore, pragmatism means also regarding themselves as agents, *i.e.,* full of preferences and biases, constantly exchanging with their context in order to further action. Pragmatic development research calls for a recognition of subjects as well as researchers as agents. In the case of the latter, this means admitting that they approach research full of interests, intentions, creativity, theories, various methodological preferences and even meaningful personal and contextual features. All of these determine the prejudiced position that influences their work and consequently ought to be duly and critically acknowledged therein.

For practitioners and academics alike, in the field of development specifically but also in the social sciences more broadly, pragmatism demands healthy awareness and criticism of preferences and biases, whether personal or contextual, in the self and in the subjects of interest. This opens up the door to plurality, to harness practical reason to solve practical problems, turning indeterminate situations into determinate ones, generating warranted assertions thereby, which are not be all and end all panaceas (as these are unattainable) but are solutions that enable us to move forward by settling issues for the time being, until that settlement is dislodged, requiring inquiry to start anew. As such, pragmatism can contribute to Woolcock's (2007, p. 57) aspiration for the field of development, namely, a community of «practical thinkers» and «reflective doers».

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Part III
Towards a Pragmatic Capability Approach

Any observed form or object is but a challenge. The case is not otherwise with ideals of justice or peace or human brotherhood, or equality, or order. They too are not things self-enclosed to be known by introspection, as objects were once supposed to be known by rational insight. Like thunderbolts and tubercular disease and the rainbow they can be known only by extensive and minute observation of consequences incurred in action.

—John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*

Chapter 5
Towards a Pragmatic Capability Approach: Agency, ontology, and empirical issues

1. Introduction

The final part of this dissertation seeks to take the argument elaborated in the previous ones to what is arguably their logical conclusion. This chapter in particular, tackles the issue of the enrichment of the CA's notion of agency with pragmatism and, by so doing, provide an answer to the question guiding this research.

To recall, the capabilitarian agent is defined in terms of the older and grander notion composed of two elements: i) acting and bringing about change; and, ii) judging those actions and changes as well as their underlying values and preferences. While the former is expressed in freedom or choice, the latter is manifested as rationality or reasoning. This notion, nonetheless, replaces a previous discussion within the CA. Until 1992, a differentiation was advanced between instrumental agency success and realized agency success. This distinction provided an account of the agency of people who others choosing and reasoning for them (e.g. children, the elderly, and people with mental disabilities). Thereafter, however, the differentiation seems to have been dropped, leaving important groups unaccounted for. Against this backdrop, a plausible complementary framework for the CA ought to be able to fill this void. Thus, this chapter elaborates on pragmatism, its notion of agency, and the extent to which it can meet that tall order.

Moreover, focusing on the CA's current notion of agency, an adequate account, duly incorporating both elements, suggests ontological implications. The first component, choice, entails attention to observables. The second, reasoning, implies the inclusion of in-principle unobservables. That means, the capabilitarian agent seems to propose a movement away from positivism but it is less clear in which direction. Due to pragmatism's philosophically ontological wagers, discussed in the previous chapter, this perspective seems to be able to encompass both. Hence, exploring the ways in which pragmatism can provide an ontological base for the CA seems like a promising undertaking.

Finally, whether in the CA or pragmatism, the treatment of agency concerns not only subjects being known but also people knowing them. In this sense, these notions effect the conduct of empirical inquiry. Accordingly, it seems warranted to discuss the position held by each framework, derived from their notion of agency, to explore the possibility of enriching the CA with pragmatism in this aspect as well.

Consequently, the argument in this chapter is structured into four sections. First, the main issue of this project, agency, is elaborated in detail. Then, a discussion regarding ontology is presented in the second section. The third is dedicated to empirical issues. A conclusion is presented in the final section.

2. Agency

Agency is of the utmost importance for both the CA and pragmatism. Indeed, Sen (1999) has referred to the CA as 'agency-oriented'. Pragmatism, in turn, could be regarded as (trans)agency-centered. As such, they show commonalities and differences. The CA makes an important contribution to the literature, moving beyond the rational agent, as depicted by rational choice theory. Instead, Sen (1999, p. 19) regards agency "[…] in its older – and 'grander' – sense as someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well."

It seems that the focus on the literature has been on the 'bringing about of change' part (choice), paying relatively less attention to 'the values and objectives of the agent themselves, used to judge their achievements' part (reasoning). In this sense, a more balanced treatment of agency warrants an account of rationality, and the CA's challenge to its traditional notion. Indeed, Sen (1977) has been emphatic in his rejection of the conventional treatment of rationality, which renders people 'rational fools'.

Hence, Sen (2002, p. 4) defines rationality as "subjecting one's choices – of actions as well as of objectives, values and priorities – to reasoned scrutiny." In his later work, Sen (2009, p. 180, emphasis in the original) specifies: "[…] rationality is primarily a matter of basing – explicitly or by implication – our choices on reasoning that we can reflectively sustain, and it demands that our choices, as well as our actions and objectives, values and

priorities, can survive our own seriously undertaken critical scrutiny". That being so, the capacity for critical self-reflection takes center stage for the CA's agent.

Contrary to what some critics have asserted, the CA's agent is neither only nor even mostly a chooser. That seems to be a myopic reduction. Certainly, this perspective regards choice very highly, for practical reasons among others, but people are much more than that. Sen (2002, p. 36) has explicitly stated:

> A person is not only an entity that can enjoy one's own consumption, experience appreciate one's welfare, and have one's goals, but also an entity that can examine one's values and objectives and choose in the light of those values and objectives. Our choices need not relentlessly follow our experiences of consumption or welfare, or simply translate perceived goals into action. We can ask what we want to do and how, and in that context also examine what we should want and how. We might or might not be much moved by moral concerns or by social reasons, but neither are we prohibited from entertaining these questions, in shaping our values and if necessary revising our objectives in that light.

Consequently, for Sen reasoning seems to be at least as significant as choice in at least three respects. First, a scrutiny of the values, aims and preferences takes place before choice. This opens the black box of preferences. Indeed, Sen (2002) argues that values themselves can be critically assessed. There can be reasons for reasons, preferences about preferences or second order preferences, e.g. for a smoker, the habit of smoking can be her first order preference but if she rather not do so, this is her second order preference.

Second, also before the choice, an analysis of the other options and the reasons for not choosing them is carried out. Bundles of options are not necessarily made equal and the reasons for rejecting meaningful alternatives can be insightful. What is more, even in the case of individuals making the same choice, their motivations might be quite different since options can be meaningful and meaningless.

Third, there is an interdependence between rationality and mediating elements (internal and external conversion factors) as well as between rationality and outcomes (freedoms and achievements). Preferences and values depend on the individual's circumstances and their rationality depends on them as well. An important issue for the CA is adaptive

preferences, which refers to the adjustments people make in order to better cope with the situation in which they find themselves, captured as external conversion factors. In situations of disadvantage, as a mechanism of self-protection from frustrations and depression, disenfranchised people adapt their aspirations, aims and values to what seems realistically feasible, finding satisfaction in small gestures and appreciating handouts (Sen 1992). As such, the reasons for preferences and goals to be valued under those circumstances may be suspect. These adaptations are also dependent on internal conversion factors as personal characteristics may alleviate or aggravate a person's situation and their capacity to cope with it.

External conversion factors, at least social ones, can also be dependent on rationality. Social as well as cultural customs, norms and institutions are the product of people's agency and they change by dint of people's agency. The critical assessment of one's values and preferences can lead to the challenge of the social structures on which they are founded, which in turn can prompt their reconsideration, revision, and transformation. How democratic nations have increased the breadth and depth of rights of their citizens is an illustration.

Rationality is not only interdependent with conversion factors but also with freedoms and achievements. Rationality is dependent on freedom in three ways. First, options have to be available for the exercise of reasoned choice. Second, in the case of multiple options, rationality has to be able to accommodate the variety of reasons and preferences supporting a choice. Third, effective opportunities to choose allow the exercise of reasoned choice, an exercise that can improve with the opportunities given. Freedom is dependent on rationality since it requires some notion of people's preferences and the reasons for those preferences. Sen (2002, p. 5) states that "freedom must depend on reasoned assessment of having different options". Rationality is dependent on functionings because they are constitutive to a person's being. As a result, they can affect the reasoned scrutiny of one's choices, actions and values. Achievements, in turn, are also dependent on rationality. Functionings may depend, *inter alia*, on the rigorousness of the scrutiny performed over one's choices and reasons.

Hence, it has been argued that instead of a rational, the CA advances a reasoning agent. This agent can be regarded as a multi-motivated, multidimensional, plural, reflective chooser. The CA's notion of agency entails a treatment of people as subjects in charge of

their own destiny, with capacity to act on the pursuit of their goals, based on a reflected-upon conception of the good. This is the main reason why the selection and valuation of capabilities and/or functionings ought to be made by the stakeholders, and why the CA is necessarily democratic.

In this sense, the relevance of rationality and freedom for agency can hardly be overstated and points to a shortcoming in the CA. Opportunity or substantive freedom is necessarily reflective and intertwined with agency. Whether in terms of self-regarding or other-regarding aims, to choose from different options entails scrutiny of preferences and is part of bringing about or achieving change. Therefore, it seems that for the CA, an agent is free and rational. As such, an account of important groups such as children, people with mental disabilities, or the elderly, who often have others deciding for them because of their incipient or limited reasoning, appears to be problematic. Before 1992, with Sen's differentiation between 'instrumental agency success', when a person's aims are reached by their own actions, and 'realized agency success', when personal objectives are realized without the person's own actions, a discussion in terms of agency applicable to these groups, placing them under the latter, was suggested. This distinction, however, seems to have been dropped thereafter without further elaboration on the issue, leaving questions regarding the treatment for those groups open.

Consequently, as far as the CA's notion of agency goes, outgrowing the rational convention, there is arguably still room for maturation. Pragmatism can serve this purpose by supporting some of the ideas in the approach and also by extending them when they seem to need it.

Pragmatism can be considered as a philosophy of action. Action is its point of departure and ultimate goal. Action is conceived broadly, applied to all life processes, encompassing intentional and non-intentional action (Testa 2016). For the study of human behavior, focusing on action, or the act, is deemed more helpful because it concerns the entirety of the organism engaged with the environment that it inhabits (Hildebrand 2008). Although the pragmatists did not elaborate on a notion of agency, that examination can informatively start from the notion of experience regarded as "[…] the entire organic agent-patient in all its interaction with the environment, natural and social" (Dewey 1917, p. 26).

The extent of the priority of action can be attested in Dewey's (1917, pp. 10-11) further elaboration of the agent's experience, which is worth quoting at length:

> Experience is primarily a process of undergoing: a process of standing something; of suffering and passion, of affection in the literal sense of these words. The organism has to endure, to undergo the consequences of its own actions. [...] Undergoing, however, is never mere passivity. The most patient patient is more than receptor. He is also an agent–a reactor, one trying experiments, one concerned with undergoing in a way which may influence what is still to happen. Sheer endurance, side-stepping evasions, are, after all, ways of treating the environment with a view to what such treatment will accomplish. Even if we shut ourselves up in the most clam-like fashion, we are doing something; our passivity is an acute attitude, not an extinction of response. Just as there is no assertive action, no aggressive attack upon things as they are, which is all action, so there is no undergoing which is not on our part also a going on and a going through.

In this sense, for pragmatism the only constant is action, as an already ongoing process. One in particular lies at its heart: habit. Habit is not an act but "an acquired predisposition to *ways* or modes of response" (Dewey 1930, p. 42, emphasis in the original). Particular actions are built on habits, the latter are the prerequisite for the former. Habits are "energetic and dominating ways of acting" (Dewey 1930, p. 25). As such, they are capable of shaping desires and ruling thoughts, and, by so doing, not only are they the core of experience formation (Testa 2016) but they can determine what we do and who we are (Hildebrand 2008). Habits, therefore, are constitutive of the self.

> All habits are demands for certain kinds of activity; and they constitute the self. In any intelligible sense of the word will, they *are* will. They form our effective desires and they furnish us with our working capacities. They rule our thoughts, determining which shall appear and be strong and which shall pass from light into obscurity (Dewey 1930, p. 25).

This means that all human capacities, from corporeal to mental attitudes, have to be developed and executed by dint of habit formation and that all human action is influenced

by prior action (Testa 2016). Consequently, Dewey (1930, p. 125) states that "[m]an is a creature of habit, not of reason nor yet of instinct"[45].

Because action entails the individual and their environment and the latter encompasses other individuals, human action is social action. The implication is that although habits are built to into people's organic nature, they are necessarily acquired via social interaction, as part of the social learning process, that starts from the moment humans are born.

> Habit is the mainspring of human action, and habits are formed for the most part under the influence of the customs of a group. [...] The dependence of habit-forming upon those habits of a group which constitutes customs is a natural consequence of the helplessness of infancy (Dewey 1946, p. 159).

At times, habits can be challenged or there may a conflict among competing habits, and then conscious, reflective or creative action is necessary to further the process. Thus, all action requires thought, but different actions demand different levels of reflection. Further, reflective action requires habitual action as a basis or as a background. As Dewey (1930, p. 67) stated "thought which does not exist within ordinary habits lacks means of execution".

To account for the relationship between individuals and their context, in his later work, Dewey emphasized the concept of 'transaction'[46]. He dismissed the prevailing notions of self-action and inter-action, which entailed, respectively, that things acted by their own powers, and that one thing is balanced against another thing as in causal relations (Dewey and Bentley 1949). Transaction challenges the idea that elements composing a system can somehow be separated from it, as if there were discontinuities in the world. Instead, it

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[45] Indeed, Dewey (1930, p. 176) asserts "habits formed in process of exercising biological aptitudes are the sole agents of observation, recollection, foresight and judgment: a mind or consciousness or soul in general which performs these operations is a myth". Furthermore, he adds "[c]oncrete habits do all the perceiving, recognizing, imagining, recalling, judging, conceiving and reasoning that is done. "Consciousness," whether as a stream or as special sensations and images, expresses functions of habits, phenomena of their formation, operation, their interruption and reorganization" (Dewey 1930, p. 177).

[46] Dewey seems to use the term 'interaction' throughout his work until his later contribution with Bentley (1949), where he argues in favour of the term 'transaction' (and rejects interaction) to account for the relation and dynamics between organism and environment in a way more consistent with pragmatism's notion of experience. Nevertheless, the literature has used both interchangeably, attributing the implications of 'transaction' to 'interaction'. Therefore, in this chapter, that practice is maintained and, in the discussion regarding pragmatism, they are considered as synonyms, unless otherwise stated.

recognizes the continuity existing between humans and their context. In other words, transaction highlights that this relationship is one indivisible unit (Dewey 1938).

Further, the continuity of action in nature was sustained by the naturalistic and evolutionary approach taken by Dewey and, later on, Mead. In fact, Mead "recognized the continuity of all types of behavior–from primitive reflexes, to habits, to reflective intelligence" (Baldwin 1988, p. 39). For him, consciousness was not exclusive to humans but a matter of degree that ranges from simple feelings, to symbolic awareness, and reflective awareness, the latter being the degree reached by human beings (Mead 1925). By so doing, mind is regarded as an evolution in nature, without primacy over other behavioral processes (Mead 1932).

Moreover, this transacting system is described as organism-environment, avoiding any metaphysical primacy of either. The environment encompasses the totality of connotations it has, *inter alia*, social, cultural, emotional, intellectual, physical, ecological, which are only analytically differentiated but exist within a single situation. In this sense, the individual and context, or knower and known, are constantly acting towards each other, changing one another and, thereby, constituting one another. This means that the world, whether social or natural, is continuously being changed by the individual's action, whether reflective or not, and individuals are continuously changed by the world. Therefore, the knower inevitably approaches the known from a socially constructed prejudiced position encompassing all their interests, preferences, values, and even imagination (inquiry as action), and neither beliefs nor the known can be interpreted independently of one another (action as inquiry).

What is more, the organism acts purposefully, seeking to affect or control those changes so that they may take one shape rather than another. For Dewey (1917) that anticipation and prospection is considered as more primary in humans than recollection and retrospection. Further, using the past to predict and control the future is what is called inference, it is the basis of conscious experience, and it is also referred to as intelligence or thought. The presence of thought enables the agent to perceive things as signs of things not yet experienced and, thereby, to act according to that which is absent or the future (Dewey 1910). While beings lacking thought act obliged by forced of which they are not aware, thinking beings or reflective agents are drawn to act by things of which they are, to different extents, aware (Dewey 1910).

Accordingly, organisms and their environments are not static but emergent, giving continued meaning to the other. Meaning, for pragmatism, is expressed in terms of action (James 1904; Peirce 1905). Ideas are regarded as forecasts of what may happen when certain actions are performed in relation to certain conditions or objects (Dewey 1917). As such, they denote a possibility (Dewey 1938).

This examination is reasoning. The process entails the analysis of the pertinence of the meaning of the idea in relation to other established meanings. Only ideas that can be so placed can authoritatively advance action, those that do not fit with other accepted meanings are mere suggestions (Dewey 1917). That is, only ideas can turn an indeterminate situation into a determinate one, becoming belief and eventually, if internalized enough, habit. Hence, "[k]nowing is the act, stimulated by this foresight, of securing and averting consequences" (Dewey 1917, p. 31). Procedurally, knowing is about scrutiny of the relations and connections among objects.

Objects, in turn, are the recipients of action. They are the things towards which action is oriented and are anything and everything that an individual notices, as a product of social interaction (Blumer 1989). They can be material or immaterial, real or fictional, etc[47]. Put simply, if the individual is aware of it, it is an object for them. This includes their preferences, reasons, values, aims, choices, and, of course, the self can be an object as well. At its most basic, the self is the object that the individual is to themselves (Blumer 2004). Consequently, objects constitute a person's world and being, just as the object is constituted by them.

As a result, pragmatism conceives of two types of basic human action: habitual, and creative (Joas 1996) or reflective. Habit is the most basic resource of action, allowing it to be a continuous process (Dewey 1930).

Nonetheless, the capacity for inference, or the anticipation of future consequences based on present conditions, is no guarantee for optimal results. As much as thinking rids people of the restrictions of instinct, impulse, and routine, it comes with the burden of the possibility of error (Dewey 1910). Thought is neither a given nor is it produced out of

[47] "[O]bjects may be material or immaterial, real or imaginary; may be placed in the outer world or, as in the case of a sensation or a pain, lodged inside the body; and may have the character of an enduring substance such as a mountain or be a passing event such as a kiss" (Blumer 2004, p. 39)

nowhere. Its fallibility is determined by personal as well as social characteristics. Both affect the extent to which adequate future consequences can be expected from objects, past or present.

> Thinking is important because, as we have seen, it is that function in which given or ascertained facts stand for or indicate others which are not directly ascertained. But the process of reaching the absent from the present is peculiarly exposed to error, it is liable to be influenced by almost any number of unseen and unconsidered causes – past experience, received dogmas, the stirring of self-interest, the arousing of passion, sheer mental laziness, a social environment steeped in biased traditions or animate by false expectations, and so on. The exercise of thought is, in the literal sense of that word, inference; by it one thing carries us over to the idea of, and belief in, another thing. It involves a jump, a leap, a going beyond what is surely known to something else accepted on its warrant (Dewey 1933, p. 26).

In this sense, thinking is not an all or nothing condition but a matter of degree. Moreover, it can be trained and improved. Inference, adequately controlled, forms proof. That control entails regulation i) of the conditions under which the function of suggestion occurs as well as ii) of the conditions under which the suggestions are admitted (Dewey 1910). To prove something means to test it. This leads to the pragmatic insight of inquiry being an experimental action.

For pragmatism, therefore, human beings are intelligent, reflective, diversely motivated organisms of habit that can be studied in terms of their objects; that is, they are transagents. As such, they are one with their contexts and know the world from their prejudiced positions, characterized by *inter alia* their interests, values and preferences. That being so, from a pragmatic perspective, there cannot be one single definitive desirable social state described as development or otherwise. Since the assessment of any situation has to incorporate all stakeholders and their positions, desirables social states can only be determined by the public. That is why pragmatism is necessarily democratic.

This discussion hints to the convergences and divergences entailed by the CA's and pragmatism's notions of agency. In order to flesh them out four themes will be elaborated,

namely, objects and habits, the constitution of individuals, values and preferences, and action and transaction.

First, although the CA stresses the importance of self-scrutiny by redefining rationality as reasoning, it does not explain how this is possible. The pragmatic focus on objects provides a basis on which the capabilitarian perspective could adequately build. Since objects are everything and anything of which a person is aware, and can act upon, the self is an object as well. Treated as such, critical self-scrutiny can ensue, based on role-taking with the introduction of a 'generalized other', and assume the shape of an internal interaction between the 'Me' and 'I'. Mead (1922, p. 161) states "It is through the ability to be the other at the same time that he is himself that the symbol becomes significant". Scrutiny of one's own values, preferences, and aims as well as choices is, therefore, possible. Importantly, however, this is possible because action is social action. Mead (1910, p. 403) asserts:

> We are conscious of our attitudes because they are responsible for the changes in the conduct of other individuals. A man's reaction toward weather conditions has no influence upon the weather itself. It is of importance for the success of his conduct that he should be conscious not of his own attitudes, of his own habits of response, but of the signs of rain or fair weather. Successful social conduct brings one into a field within which a consciousness of one's own attitudes helps toward the control of the conduct of others.

Furthermore, this also enables the critical assessment of reasons for the reasons leading to a choice, i.e. second order reasons or preferences. By so doing, pragmatism can provide a basis with which to support the analysis of relevant in-principle unobservables, which the CA's notion of agency seems to require.

Similarly, although the CA's agency pays attention to in-principle unobservables, the observables it considers relevant could also be enriched. This is because the approach privileges choice, understood as the product of reflective assessment, which seems to justify some critiques about its agency's robustness. As such, it either leaves out of the analysis unreflective actions or assumes that all actions are reflective. Either approach seems to be limited. The former leaves out important groups. The latter contradicts human experience. From a pragmatic perspective, a habit, by virtue of being "a predisposition formed by a number of specific acts is an immensely more intimate and fundamental part

of ourselves than are vague, general, conscious choices" (Dewey 1930, p. 25). That is, habits manifest the most internalized meanings individuals have regarding the objects that make up their world, i.e. interpretations of which a person is likely not to be fully aware. Habits, thus, make the world intelligible. They make reflection possible and are logically prior to it, establishing its resources as well as mechanisms, and, by so doing, make sense of any reflective action, or choice.

Importantly, habits can be treated as objects, whether by the subject of interest themselves or by an external observer, e.g. a researcher and practitioner. That is, one can be aware of some of their own habits, and others can be aware of the habits unbeknownst to one. Hence, they can be critically analyzed and changed. For instance, in the case of a smoker, the habit of smoking (first order preference) can be scrutinized in light of its detrimental effects on health (second order preference) and be acted upon the latter. Similarly, other habits of which a person may be less aware, such overeating or eating foods detrimental to one's health, can be (and has been) addressed by public policy. As Baldwin (1998, pp. 38-99) states:

> Habitual and deliberated activities often interpenetrate, and any given chain of responses may involve various combinatios of habitual and deliberated elements. Therefore, it is important to note that labeling a behavior–such as walking, saying "thank you," or frequently giving advice to others–as a "habit" is not intended to suggest that the behavior never involves conscious choices or it cannot be controlled by conscious intervention.

One interesting area in which this pragmatic insight can contribute is the analysis of adaptive preferences. Downtrodden individuals are likely to settle for that which is within their means, finding satisfaction in the fulfilment of those desires and avoiding frustration and disappointment of not achieving other valuable things beyond their reach. Although this process of adaptation can take different levels of awareness, eventually habits are generated, which make situations of hardship understandable under a different light.

What is more, because of the focus on the continuity in nature, its naturalistic philosophy affords pragmatism a broader account of human agency, including groups with limited rationality like children, people suffering from mental disabilities, or the elderly. While the CA's focus on choice (and freedom) suggests a focus on reflective intelligence, the

pragmatic perspective encompasses all of human behavior from primitive reflexes, to habits, to reflective intelligence.

Second, even though the CA goes far in acknowledging human plurality and regarding individuals as diversely constituted, it could arguably go even farther. The approach stresses that functionings, achieved doings and beings or types of life (Sen 1993), that people value and have reason to value, are constitutive of a person's being (Sen 1992). Although it is not explicitly stated in the literature, it is clear enough that internal or personal conversion factors can also be regarded as constitutive of a person's being. In fact, it can be rather difficult in certain situations to draw a line and distinguish between achievement or deprivations and personal features.

Accordingly, the constitution of people is relevant since it can be an intrinsically valuable aspect of life, deserving of assessment, or a mediating factor enabling or curtailing improvements in someone's quality of life.

Pragmatism expands on the things that are constitutive of a person's being. To recall, pragmatic transaction entails that organism and environment are a single unit in which they mutually change and constitute each other. Moreover, as has been mentioned above, from this perspective, human beings are constituted by their objects and habits. Objects are all the things that they notice and, as such, can have all natures and characters. Therefore, they can certainly be functionings and internal conversion factors, as people can act towards them according to their meanings. However, they can also be much more than that. For instance, they can be capabilities, whether effective opportunities or process freedoms, as people can be aware of both (or the lack thereof) and act upon that awareness. Additionally, external conversion factors can also be acted upon and individuals and societies as a matter of fact do, which leads to societal change or the maintenance of the *status quo*. Likewise, they can also be habits (unreflective acts) which, as mentioned above, can prove rather useful for certain purposes.

Regarding objects as constitutive of a person's being can contribute to the CA because the meaning of objects is defined in terms of action. The CA regards achievements and personal features as constitutive of someone since they connote what a person is and does. To develop the import of pragmatism for the CA, it might be instructive to tackle each. Regarding 'what someone is', besides their actions, one could ask: is a person not the

complex tapestry made up of their preferences, values, fears, dreams, traumas, and insecurities? These objects may not be observable but are certainly personal features which could even be regarded as internal conversion factors since they can intervene in the translation of resources into CA-relevant outcomes. By the same token, are those preferences, values, fears and insecurities not, to a large extent, socially constructed? These unobservable objects are deeply related to external conversion factors or contextual features, which shows that sometimes it can be rather difficult to separate the latter from internal or personal ones. The CA's famous example of the capability of showing oneself in public without shame can be illustrative of this point, as different contexts may exert different demands on people to rid themselves of shame.

Apropos of 'what a person does', from the pragmatic perspective, action can be more or less reflective. When it is more reflective, it is directed towards objects, when it is less reflective it can be regarded as a habit. The universe of possibilities for someone is determined by the objects in their existence and these become intelligible in light of their habits, which are intertwined with social habits, institutions and customs. Thus, both can be relevant for the CA since the former is constitutive of a person's world and the latter is constitutive of a person's being.

Consequently, pragmatism goes at least one step further than the CA and taking that step is arguably sensible for the latter. On the one hand, the capabilitarian perspective already admits the analysis of in-principle unobservables with its redefinition of rationality as reasoning so that should not pose a great challenge. On the other hand, recognizing that such entities also constitute humans not only can enrich its notorious focus on human diversity but, by so doing, it can contribute to a more nuanced account for empirical endeavors, better capturing human experience itself.

Third, related to the above, and specifically addressing values and preferences, the CA's reasoning agent deepens and strengthens the study of agency underlining the importance of preferences, even including the possibility of second order preferences. Nevertheless, an account of their nature, function and change seems to be absent in the literature. Pragmatism could help fill this void. Their nature has been addressed in the previous discussion arguing in favor of their treatment as objects and their inclusion as constitutive of a person's being, so this subsection tackles its function.

Pragmatism's focus on action has important bearings on the treatment of values and, thus, preferences. For Dewey (1929, p. 243), values "designate whatever is taken to have rightful authority in the direction of conduct". The 'rightful authority' qualification refers to the intervention of intelligence or inquiry in regulating values. Dewey (1929, p. 246) posits that values are "[…] enjoyments which are the consequences of intelligent action. Without intervention of thought, enjoyments are not values but problematic goods, becoming values when they re-issue in a changed form from intelligent behaviour."

Enjoyments and likings, thus, are only possibilities of values that can be aquired. They become values once the relations upon which they occur are identified and acted upon. Much like ideas, values only acquire authority to guide action insofar as their meaning can be accommodated with other established meanings. That is, the legitimacy of preferences depends on their rationalization or the extent to which the relations determining their occurrence are inquired into and known[48].

Hence, conceptions that prompt action are the conditions that lead to the generation of values. This difference between enjoyments or likings and values can be illustrated by the distinction between propositions and judgments. The former refers descriptively to facts that have already happened and are associated to enjoyments or likings. The latter refers normatively to facts that should come about and are, thus, related to values. Dewey (1929) exemplifies the difference between enjoyed and the enjoyable, the desired and the desirable, the satisfying and the satisfactory[49]. While the first in each pair denotes only a state, the second in each pair induces action.

Values and preferences are not formed in a vacuum but are the product of the transaction of organism and environment. "Social conditions and pressures are part of the conditions that affect the execution of desires. Hence, they have to be taken into account in framing ends in terms of available means" (Dewey 1939, p. 32).

[48] "There is no knowledge without perception; but objects perceived are *known* only when they are determined as consequences of connective operations. There is no value except where there is satisfaction, but there have to be certain conditions fulfilled to transform a satisfaction into a value" Dewey (1929, p. 255, emphasis in the original).

[49] "Consider the difference between the proposition 'That thing has been eaten,' and the judgment 'That thing is edible.' The former statement involves no knowledge of any relation except the one states; while we are able to judge of the edibility of anything only when we have a knowledge of its interactions with other things sufficient to enable us to foresee its probable effects when it is taken into the organism and produces effects there" (Dewey 1929, p. 254).

As a result, pragmatism goes beyond the conventional approach to human agency. The study of habits enables the scrutiny of preferences. For pragmatism *de gustibus est disputandum* and, in fact, values and preferences should be prioritized in the analysis. From this perspective, accounting for tastes and preferences is most informative to expose reasons, which, for Dewey, go beyond self-regarding and unreflective motivations.

> Expertness of taste is at once the result and the reward of constant exercise in thinking. Instead of there being no disputing about tastes, they are the one thing worth disputing about, if by "dispute" is signified discussion involving reflective inquiry. Taste, if we use the word in its best sense, is the outcome of experience brought cumulatively to bear on the intelligent appreciation of the real worth of likings and enjoyments. There is nothing in which a person so completely reveals himself as in the things which he judges enjoyable and desirable. Such judgments are the sole alternative to the domination of belief by impulse, chance, blind habit and self-interest. (Dewey 1929, p. 249-250).

By guiding action, preferences and desires become causal conditions leading to ends themselves (Dewey 1939). In this sense, pragmatism's recognition of the significance of preferences in the analysis of the agent enlarges the scrutiny with the inclusion of means, in addition to ends. At the same time, since values guide action, much like beliefs or warranted assertions, they also do so temporarily as they are subject to revision once action is thwarted.

Consequently, preferences and values change and pragmatism can provide an elucidation. The account is twofold. On the one hand, values and preferences change when they no longer further action. On the other hand, they are subject to constant change because of transaction and the mutual constitution of organism and environment. Individuals are more than mere receptors, instead the actor is regarded as in constant action. Pragmatism rejects the Reflex Arc concept and the view of people as merely reacting to stimuli. The transactional perspective holds that individuals, by acting with imagination, act with intentionality, entailing a creative interpretation of the environment (Khalil 2004). This interpretation can change as the agent pursues their goals since their engagement with the environment changes them (as they change it). Similarly, this engagement and mutual constitution can lead to changes in the goals, values and preferences themselves.

Fourth, despite the great addition that the CA has made in terms of the relationship between the individual and their context, it could still be further enhanced. Conversion factors and process freedoms do a great service in approximating this relationship. Conversion factors highlight inter-individual variation and is deeply interrelated to inter-end variation. Indeed, the actual freedom that an individual may have to pursue their valued ends depends on two factors: i) the ends that they have; and, ii) the power they have to convert resources or means into the achievement of those ends (Sen 1992). The latter depends on people's personal features (gender, class status, age, ethnicity, etc.) and those of the context in which they live (the country's capital, a religious family, a patriarchic society, etc.). Process freedoms refer to the processes, institutions and rules governing a community. As such, there is not necessarily a clear-cut line distinguishing them from social conversion factors, and for current purposes there need not be.

The importance of external conversion factors can hardly be overstated. They mediate the translation of resources into capabilities and functionings and, as has been argued above, in addition to other effects, they do so by affecting reasoning in, at least, a twofold manner. Social context can determine what is valuable and it can also establish the parameters of critical scrutiny to make such determination. These are, certainly, deeply interrelated matters.

The CA's contribution notwithstanding, it seems to maintain undertones of a focus on inter-action in the relation between individuals and context. Focusing on each entity composing this interchange, suggests that one thing is somehow balanced against another thing as in causal relations (Dewey and Bentley 1949). Pragmatism can contribute to address this limitation by dint of its notion of transaction, briefly mentioned above and expanded in what follows.

Transaction is proposed by pragmatism to account for the relation between organism and environment. As already mentioned, this entails regarding the organism-environment system as a unit. Its elements cannot be easily detached, separated or understood absent the other. Humans and their context (nature and society) are part of a continuity, which cannot be broken into specific parts. There are no discontinuities in the world and, as a result, there are no discontinuities among organism and environment. Both are becoming and emergent, as they are in constant action towards each other, thereby changing and

constituting one another. That being so, it has been argued in favor of referring to pragmatic agency as transagency.

Transagency entails that human beings generate the meanings of the objects and habits by which they are constituted by transacting with each other. Therefore, what is regarded as an indeterminate situation, i.e. doubt, is decided as part of the dynamic process that is transaction. The same applies to the ways in which that situation can be turned into a determinate one. Further, what is considered as a determinate situation itself, i.e. belief, and, thus, what warranted assertions are, is also subject to that transaction.

Accordingly, pragmatic action is social action (Gillespie 2005). This means that individuals not only change each other but mutually constitute one another. Meanings, values and preferences, and even belief and doubt are the product of the mutual exchange among individuals. Therefore, individual habits depend on social ones. In fact, even the self depends on social habits: "The structure of society lies in these social habits, and only insofar as we can take these social habits into ourselves can we become selves" (Mead 1936, p. 375).

With the notion of transaction pragmatism provides a rich account of the relation between humans and context that is closer to human experience. This seems to coincide with the CA's project. Consequently, the CA could gain from the incorporation of transaction without no particular loss, as it seems to address some of its shortcomings, particularly critiques of over-robustness. In order to do that, though, it would have to learn from its ontology, another area from which there are lessons to be learnt.

3. Ontology

The CA's agency has important implications for development research and practice. It has been argued that the relevance given to rationality, redefined as reasoning, entails attention to interpretation and meaning. This calls for a move beyond a positivist philosophy of science. Nonetheless, it is much less clear to where that move should be oriented. This is particularly so since the reasoning agent advocates the inclusion of meaning in the analysis, when warranted, not the substitution of measurement.

Sen has not addressed ontological issues directly within the approach. At most, distinguishing ethical individualism from methodological individualism, Robeyns (2005, p. 108) has argued that "a commitment to ethical individualism is not incompatible with an ontology that recognizes the connections between people, their social relations, and their social embedment" and concluded that "[t]he capability approach embraces ethical individualism, but does not rely on ontological individualism". Sen (2009) has echoed this position.

In this sense, although it has become clearer what the CA does not subscribe to, it is less clear what it adheres to. As a result, it has been argued that the CA suffers from being theoretically underspecified and that it has to be supplemented with additional theories, such as ontological theories about certain aspects of social and individual lives (Robeyns 2008, p. 94).

Despite Sen's omission, some ontological insights can be gained from his work[50]. The interdependence established between agency and social structures, conceived by the CA as some external conversion factors, suggests a relational ontology. Social structures exert an influence over, without determining, individual agency. Sen (2009, p. 245) states:

> When someone thinks and chooses and does something, it is, for sure, that person – and not someone else – who is doing these things. But it would be hard to understand why and how he or she undertakes these activities without some comprehension of his or her societal relations.

Additionally, Sen's redefinition of rationality as reasoning also addresses these dynamics, with an emphasis on the inverse direction or the influence of agency on social structures. Since individual preferences and values are influenced by social ones and the capabilitarian agent can, and should, critically scrutinize the former, it can also do so for the latter. Hence, the CA's agency can contribute to provide an account of social change.

Moreover, Sen (1977) also admits the possibility of commitments to others, encompassing choices and actions that are carried out with anticipated increases in well-being but that

[50] In fact, it has been argued that the CA itself seems to be an ontological exercise. Martins (2011) asserts that, given the approach's proposal to move the evaluative space of inquiry from opulence and utility to freedom and achievements, it can be regarded as an answer to the ontological question "what is human well-being?"

not being the reason for them, e.g. because it is the 'right thing to do' (Sen 2002) as well as the recognition of multiple identities with affiliations to different groups that can guide action (Sen 2006) , suggesting thereby a social ontology.

> Behaviour is ultimately a social matter as well, and thinking in terms of what 'we' should do, or what should be 'our' strategy, may reflect a sense of identity involving recognition of other people's goals and the mutual interdependencies involved. (Sen 1987, p. 85)

The CA's social ontology is further supported by its admission of the study of mind-dependent and mind independent phenomena. The CA's agent, as a multi-motivated, multidimensional, plural, reflective chooser can be regarded as a minded entity. As such, they create mind-dependent things, like social phenomena, since they could not exist in a world lacking minded individuals (Blake 2019). The social world, understood by the CA as social conversion factors (e.g. judicial systems, customs, family traditions, and importantly for the CA, markets), illustrate a mind-dependent creation of agents. At the same time, the CA's environmental conversion factors (e.g. droughts) can be regarded as mind-independent phenomena since they can conceivably occur in a world without minded entities. Hence, since society and its features cannot be reduced to individuals and their features, "identifying the capability approach as methodological individualism would be a significant mistake" (Sen 2009, 244)[51].

What these insights have in common is that they refer to a conventional notion of ontology, namely, an inquiry to the nature of being (Latsis 2013) or reality (Martins 2011), that studies the entities that exist and their properties (Martins 2009), even constructing an inventory of them (Baker 2019). This notion has been regarded as rather restrictive (Epstein 2015), and to differentiate it from wider endeavors, it has been qualified as *scientific* (Jackson 2011).

Even though providing a fully fleshed out ontological account of the CA falls outside the purview of this project, the study of its notion of agency has pointed in interesting directions. Thus, hinting to a broader notion of ontology, it has been argued that the CA's

[51] Apropos of this, Sen (2009, p. 245) clarifies forcefully: "The presence of individuals who think, choose and act – a manifest reality in the world – does not make an approach methodologically individualist. It is the illegitimate invoking of any presumption of independence of the thoughts and actions of persons from the society around them that would bring the feared beast into the living room".

agency admits of observables and in-principle unobservables. The study of choices as well as preferences and values, respectively, evidence this position. Sen, however, has not made ontological claims regarding either (although the former is less controversial than the latter). In order to complement this state of affairs, pragmatism could prove useful.

Against convention, in order to present pragmatism's contribution, whose position has proven challenging to locate (Hildebrand 2005), the argument has been elaborated in terms of *philosophical* ontology. This is concerned with the 'hook up' people have with the world and, thus, is logically prior to the scientific one (Jackson 2011). From this perspective, it has been argued that pragmatism falls within analyticism as it seems to subscribe to its philosophical wagers, namely, mind-world monism and phenomenalism. Monism holds that the mind and the world are one and the same. Thus, it is perhaps best illustrated by the notion of transaction. Phenomenalism posits that only that which can be experienced can be known. Because of its adherence to monism, this means that in-principle unobservables can also be known, as long as they are experienced, and as long as no ontological commitment regarding their existence is made. As such, it is best illustrated by the notion of objects. Consequently, while its subscription to mind-world monism allows for the study of meanings and interpretations with attention to self-biases, phenomenalism enables the study of in-principle unobservables, like preferences and values, alongside observables such as choices.

Because pragmatism's point of departure is action, not mind or things (Friedrichs and Kratochwil 2009), human action (transaction), is taken to be a primitive fact. That is, it is the fundamental phenomenon for which causal explanation is not required (Testa 2016). Moreover, given that transaction involves an exchange between organisms and their environment, individuals and their context, and the latter includes other organisms or individuals (social context), it has been asserted that human action is social action. Group life, as people's acting itself, entails the interactive process, composed of *i)* indication, *ii)* interpretation, *iii)* formulation of response, and *iv)* action (Blumer 2004). Thus, pragmatism entails a relational ontology. Dewey (1946) introduces the concept of association, conceived broadly, to elaborate the constant and inevitable relation and connection among organisms[52].

[52] In this sense, referring to humans, and rejecting individualism as a philosophy, Dewey (1946, p. 22 emphasis in the original) asserts "Even if "consciousness" were the wholly private matter that the individualistic tradition in philosophy and psychology supposes it to be, it would still be true that consciousness is *of* objects not of itself"

> Association in the sense of connection and combination is a "law" of everything known to exist. Singular things act, but act together. Nothing has been discovered which acts in isolation. The action of everything is along with the action of other things (Dewey 1946, p. 22).

Specifically, transaction among organisms, i.e. group life, is referred to as 'conjoint action' (Dewey 1946). Conjoint action is also taken to be a primitive fact that cannot be reduced to individual action (Testa 2016). While composed of a multiplicity of acts or actions, conjoint action is distinct from any one of them and from their aggregation (e.g. marriage, a market exchange, an armed conflict, a lecture). Accordingly, Dewey (1946, p. 23) emphatically states "[t]here is no sense in asking how individuals come to be associated. They exist and operate in association". In this sense, pragmatism's social transaction (transaction among humans) in the form of conjoint action evidences its social ontology.

Since human action takes place in the context of prior action, habits are fundamental to better grasp pragmatism's social ontology. As mentioned above, individual habits are constitutive of the self, they are the basic structure of life. Moreover, they are influenced by social habits or customs. As a result, the latter are constitutive of social groups or entities (e.g. a family, a church, a corporation, a nation).

Habits can also shed light on social action, social reality and change. This can be elaborated based on the possibility of self-reflection, a product of social transaction. Mead (1934) takes the insights of the dynamics of group life to a person's internal realm and explains reflection with the exchange between the 'me' and the 'I'. The former refers to the habits reflexively acquired, or the generalized other, which are accessible to conscious scrutiny. The latter denotes the anticipatory response to the 'me' and introduces divergence and novel possibilities to the self. Thus, the 'I' enables change, without it the self would be a reflection of social structures. Therefore, this transaction makes possible the change in social habits.

Furthermore, for pragmatism human transaction or conjoint action can account for change in social reality via collective action. When there is a shared perception of a problem, a social entity denoted as 'the public' is formed by those affected, which engage

in shared action towards generating a solution, i.e. conjoint action. Dewey (1946, pp. 85) states:

> Those indirectly and seriously affected for good or for evil form a group distinctive enough to require recognition and a name. The name selected is The Public. This public is organized and made effective by means of representatives who as guardians of custom, as legislators, as executives, judges, etc., care for its especial interests by methods intended to regulate the conjoint actions of individuals and groups.

More broadly, human action is directed towards objects, which are the product of social interaction. As such, they are human constructs and have no intrinsic nature (Blumer 1986). Objects constitute the environment or the world that organisms inhabit and they acquire meaning in the transaction between them and organisms[53]. In the case of humans and social transaction, objects are constituted in the social process of experience (Mead 1934), which can be analytically depicted in the aforementioned phases of group life. Being anything and everything that can be designated, if an individual is aware of it, it is an object for them. As such, objects undergird pragmatism's social ontology.

In this sense, objects are ontologically dependent on social interaction and, at the same, they have knowable properties. This is particularly important in the case of social entities, such as institutions, social groups, corporations, etc. an account of which has proven challenging in ontological terms (Epstein 2016). Social entities can be difficult to grasp ontologically because their existence cannot be objectively determined, since they seem to have an (inter) subjective nature and, at the same time, have properties that can be known (Testa 2016). As can be expected, however, this appears particularly challenging if ontology is regarded as *scientific*, which subordinates epistemology to it (Jackson 2011), and even more so if it is positivist. Indeed, Dewey (1929, p. 197) seems to move beyond that convention and has explicitly said "A corporation is neither a mental state nor a particular physical event in space and time. Yet it is an objective reality, not an ideal Realm Being. It is an objective reality which has multitudinous physical and mental consequences". He goes on to assert "It is something which may be conducted, facilitated and obstructed, precisely as may be a river. Nevertheless, it would not exist nor have any

[53] "Take the case of food. If an animal that can digest grass, such as an ox, comes into the world, then grass becomes food. That object did not exist before, that is, grass as food. The advent of the ox brings in a new object" (Mead 1934, p. 129).

meaning and potency apart from an interaction of human beings with one another, an interaction in which external things are implicated" (Dewey 1929, p. 197). This argument underscores pragmatism's rejection of methodological individualism.

As a consequence, objects could be said to encompass both mind-dependent as well as mind-independent phenomena. Being intelligent, reflective, diversely motivated organisms of habit that can be studied in terms of their objects, the pragmatic transagent can be regarded as a minded entity surrounded by non-minded entities as well as other minded-entities, i.e. their context or environment. Although the admission of this distinction seems to be supported by Dewey[54] (1946), pragmatism's focus on action moves beyond the primacy of the mind, privileging habits instead.

> These others are not just persons in general with minds in general. They are beings with habits, and beings who upon the whole esteem the habits they have, if for no other reason than that, having them, their imagination is thereby limited. The nature of habit is to be assertive, insistent, self-perpetuating. (Dewey 1930, p. 58).

Having briefly explored some relatively unattended ontological aspects entailed by the CA, this section has further elaborated on pragmatism's philosophically ontological wagers. This discussion suggests that there is some consonance between the social ontologies of the CA and pragmatism and hinted how the latter can benefit the former by elaborating on the notions of transaction and objects. In previous sections, it has been suggested that the CA seems to resonate with these concepts and, in fact, it is not far from them. Its move from focusing on the means to the ends of development (capabilities and functionings), its attention to human plurality via inter-end and inter-individual (conversion factors) variation, and the relevance of rationality as reasoning are but a small illustration of this. Additionally, other themes relevant for the approach, such as collective action could be further elaborated. In order to take the next step and reap the benefits from pragmatism, adhering to its analyticist wagers seems like the pragmatic thing to do.

[54] "But the difference between facts which are what they are independent of human desire and endeavor and facts which are to some extent what they are because of human interest and purpose, and which alter with alteration in the latter, cannot be got rid of by any methodology. The more sincerely we appeal to facts, the greater is the importance of the distinction between facts which condition human activity and facts which are conditioned by human activity" (Dewey 1946, p. 7).

4. Empirical issues

Beyond agency, the CA and pragmatism point to different implications for the conduct of empirical inquiry. The capabilitarian perspective advances a rich evaluative space and, by so doing, enlarges the informational base, relative to the conventional opulence-centric approach. This can be rather demanding for empirical applications and capabilities themselves may present the greatest challenge. Nonetheless, the CA has shown flexibility to accommodate empirical exercises adjusted to practical considerations. For instance, one suggestion put forward has been considering 'refined functionings', which entails regarding the chosen functioning vector as the equivalent to focusing on the capability set, so as to incorporate the options available in the analysis. An alternative, also mentioned in the literature, is focusing on achieved functionings but also include choosing as one valuable functioning.

In this sense, Sen (1999) distinguishes two levels of significance: the foundational and the practical one. The former refers to the capability perspective's merits in contrast to the alternatives. The latter refers to empirical inquiry and is not as straight forward. Focusing exclusively on capabilities, for example, may not be warranted. Some capabilities may defy measurement more than others and attempts to capture them within a metric is likely to obscure them instead of illuminating them.

Therefore, the CA has recognized the strong need for practical compromises in evaluative exercises. Sen (1992, p. 53) has stated "Practical compromises have to be based with an eye both to (1) the range of our ultimate interests, and (2) the contingent circumstances of informational availability". Three alternative practical approaches to operationalize the capability perspective have been suggested, to wit, the direct, the supplementary, and the indirect approach (Sen 1992).

Hence, the exact shape that the exercise may take depends both on its purposes and on the information available. Sen (1999, p. 85) asserts: "The foundational proposition of the importance of capabilities can go with various strategies of actual evaluation involving practical compromises", and then continues "It is this combination of foundational analysis and pragmatic use that gives the capability approach its extensive reach" (Sen 1999, p. 86).

Although this discussion may suggest a coincidence with pragmatism, its adherence seems to be to a lay understanding of pragmatism rather than to its philosophy of science. In fact, this example could indicate traces of positivism within the approach. The CA's interest in carrying its project forward undeterred by the inability of capturing capabilities seems pragmatic enough, perhaps coming close to the pragmatic notion of warranted assertibility and its concern with belief that can settle an issue for current purposes and for the time being, renouncing any aspiration of definitiveness. Nevertheless, the fact that the admission of practical compromises is related mostly, and explicitly, to data availability, without really specifying the data required, could suggest that the CA adheres to some version of positivism and its correspondence theory of truth. That is, for the approach, the generation of knowledge, as 'truth', about the world seems to remain an actual possibility. If current efforts cannot, it is only because data currently available impedes it.

Pragmatism takes a different approach. From this perspective, action is an engagement between an organism and its environment. Accordingly, organism and environment are one single indivisible unit in constant action, mutually changing one another, mutually constituting each other. Action maintains a certain state of affairs or changes it. Therefore, all action is constitutive of the world. Certainly, this includes human actions like scientific endeavors and policy making.

One particular action is of interest here, namely inquiry. In order to escape from an indeterminate situation and return to action, humans engage in inquiry, which is action engaging the world, probing it with different ideas, to produce belief to guide action anew, i.e. a determinate situation. Hence, for pragmatism, inquiry is action, and action is inquiry. Inquiry as action means that knowing is acting on the world from one's unescapable biases. Because of that, the latter are as intrinsic as empirical evidence is to statements about "reality". Further, these statements do not solely refer to a "reality" but shape it according to the beliefs that are warranted. "This means that true inquiry cannot take place within an ivory tower and inquirers cannot pretend to be above the fray of their own interests, beliefs, passions and imagination" (Khalil 2004, p. 2).

Action as inquiry, in turn, highlights the mutual constitution of organism and environment, i.e. transaction. The transactional view holds that the belief produced in the knower cannot come about absent the known and that the known cannot be defined

independently of the knower, precisely because the knower acts intentionally (with preferences, values, and imagination.

Significantly, inquiry is experimental. This entails that inquiry is an in-principle never-ending process of constant trial an error. The idea of a universal 'truth', expressed in statements that reflect (like a mirror) the world, is abandoned. Dewey (1985, p. 163) states that "[…] conceptions, theories and systems of thought […] are tools. As in the case of all tools, their value resides not in themselves but in their capacity to work shown in the consequences of their use". Experience shows that their usability eventually expires as the world (organism and environment) changes, requiring new ones. That is, all products of inquiry, all insights, are inevitably fallible.

Thus, any belief (or 'knowledge') generated pragmatically settles a contentious issue only temporarily. The issue is settled for as long as the belief furthers action. Once the latter is disturbed, i.e. doubt emerges, inquiry starts anew. The emphasis on warrantedly assertible insights that produce that settlement speaks volumes of pragmatism's commitment to the provisional character of knowledge.

Consequently, in contrast to what the CA seems to suggest, the pragmatism's 'pragmatic approach' regarding inquiry is not based on the availability of data. For pragmatism no quantity or quality of data could ever speak for itself or reflect the world as it is, since it is always generated and consumed by someone with an inescapable standpoint or prejudiced position. Instead, its pragmatic stance is based on the very notion that, since all warranted assertions inherently incorporate a bias, whence their fallibility comes, the pursuit or expectation of certainty is futile. Inquiry need not aim at the unattainable goal of 'truth' to produce useful insights deserving of the label 'knowledge', it suffices for it to aim for advancing action here and now (there and then) and provide provisional solutions. This, however, is no cause of embarrassment. It would only be so if assessed from the standards placed by a positivist perspective.

What is more, for pragmatism, not only is that aspiration, and its concomitant Cartesian anxiety (Bernstein 1983), unnecessary but it is also unjustified. The growth of knowledge can confidently continue with pragmatic nourishment. In fact, it arguably already has, at least partially. The increasing empirical literature paying attention to interpretation and reflexivity, as well as the work carried at the intersection of quantitative and qualitative

research suggest as much. It could be argued that these efforts are pragmatic without knowing it, proving that pragmatism may, after all, be 'a new name for some old ways of thinking' (James 1907) and acting. Nonetheless, since pragmatic inquiry demands awareness of (self) biases, explicit acknowledgment of its (partial) influence is advisable.

In this sense, for the conduct of inquiry, the CA can also benefit from pragmatism. It would not only rid empirical applications of the anxiety entailed in the pursuit of definitive answers, or the right answer, it would also harness the pluralistic and democratic nature of the CA for development research and practice. These are deeply intertwined issues. On the one hand, the provisional character of knowledge alleviates the expectations placed on inquiry. On the other hand, this does not mean that 'anything goes', but rather that insights and contributions, to be considered so, have to be assessed by the community of practitioners and scholars, and stakeholders as well, in terms of their ability to further action. Finally, and in the same vein, it calls for the critical awareness of the biases in the self and in others, since all action and knowledge are produced from a prejudiced position. This is part and parcel of regarding humans as agents. Certainly, as has been argued above, the CA's reasoning agent leans towards this position. Endorsement of pragmatism would allow it to take the leap.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the issue of the plausibility of enriching the CA's notion of agency with classical pragmatism. As such, it has sought to provide an answer for the question guiding this research. In that undertaking, complementary and relevant themes have also been addressed, such ontology and empirical issues.

Regarding agency, four themes have been addressed: objects and habits, the constitution of people, values and preferences, and the relation between agent and context. As has been argued in chapter two, the CA's reasoning agent already admits, and even requires, the inclusion of in-principle unobservables due to its attention to preferences, values and reasons. In this sense, the incorporation of pragmatic objects and habits could be the next step in that direction. Moreover, the inclusion of habits particularly can contribute to encompassing non reflective behavior, in addition to the reflective one entailed by choice (the main focus of the CA) which would allow to account for the behavior in relevant societal groups that the CA seems to have left unaccounted for. Similarly, the inclusion of

habits and objects could also enhance the elements constituting people, beyond the CA's warranted focus on achievements and personal characteristics. By the same token, it could build on pragmatism to make better sense of the nature and function of values and preferences, contributing thereby to an account of change in them, perhaps most useful in the study of adaptive preferences. Additionally, the CA seems to retain undertones of inter-action to account for the relation between the agent and their context. Pragmatism's concept of transaction could enrich this account, addressing thereby critiques of over-robustness in the CA's agency.

As for ontology, Sen has abstained from addressing ontological issues explicitly, and this has proven to be a relevant absence. While the analysis suggests traces of positivism, the CA's reasoning agent suggests the importance of the inclusion of in-principle unobservables, which requires theoretical grounding to support it and to guide empirical efforts. This addition points to the pertinence of incorporating interpretation and meaning to the analysis, when warranted, alongside measurement. It has been argued that pragmatism could plausibly fill the gap due to its adherence to an analyticist philosophy of science. While its subscription to mind-world monism allows for the study of preferences and values, phenomenalism enables the study of in-principle unobservables alongside observables.

As for empirical matters, the CA has shown flexibility justified in terms appealing to the pragmatic perspective. Its approach to studying capabilities is an illustration. The CA seems willing to move research and practice forward despite imprecision in measurement and analysis. Nonetheless, this seems closer to the lay notion of pragmatism than its actual philosophy. Its focus on information availability indicates vestiges of some version of positivism. Pragmatism moves research and practice forward taking the provisional character of knowledge seriously because of the inherent biases of those producing it and consuming it. Hence, from this perspective, no amount or type of data could ever speak for itself, it necessarily speaks through someone.

The argument has sought to start to make the case in favor of enriching the CA with pragmatism. The next chapter continues this undertaking presenting the closing arguments. In this chapter the communion between the frameworks has been underscored and the benefits of that complementarity elaborated in terms of agency, ontology and empirical issues. Certainly, the discussion has not been exhaustive and it

need not be so. It suffices to establish an initial argument supporting the soundness of such research agenda. As such, may it be a stepping stone towards a pragmatic capability approach.

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Chapter 6
Towards a Pragmatic Capability Approach: freedom, democracy, and normativity

1. Introduction

The final chapter of this dissertation continues the discussion started in the previous one and aims to take the argument elaborated in part I and II to their logical conclusion. In that sense, this chapter builds on the insights gained from the discussion regarding agency in the previous one and explores the implications for additionally relevant themes for both literatures. As in chapter 5, this is carried out in terms of the consonance and dissonance found between the CA and pragmatism.

As mentioned earlier, and stressed by the CA, there is a deep interwovenness between agency and freedom. From this perspective, they are interdependent and crucial for its project. Sen (1999) has referred to the approach as freedom-centered and agency-oriented. This discussion seems particularly pertinent given the CA's apparent embrace of freedom as control and the consequences this has had for the capabilitarian agent, i.e. leaving the agency of some groups unaccounted for. Consequently, fleshing out the notions of freedom for both the CA and pragmatism and indicating some implications of enriching the former with the latter appears to be a fruitful endeavor.

Regarding people as agents, for the CA, means recognizing their ability to choose and reason. On that basis, they are regarded as in charge of their lives and destinies. That is why the selection and valuation of freedoms and achievements ought to take place in the public sphere (Sen 1999). That is, the CA's inherent democratic and participatory character derives from its notion of agency. Pragmatism's democratic nature also comes from its notion of agency. In this sense, it seems warranted to elaborate on the notions of democracy for each framework and point to avenues in which pragmatism can contribute to the CA.

The CA is a normative framework (Robeyns 2006). It advocates for freedom and agency. It is concerned with outcomes in terms of people and their quality of life. As such, it is a consequentialist framework. This broad position is shared by pragmatism and its concern

with action. Given the prominence of human action in both frameworks in normative terms, this theme deserves adequate attention.

To tackle those themes, the argument is structured into four sections. First, freedom in both frameworks is elaborated. In the second section, their support for democracy is addressed. A discussion regarding normativity is presented in the third section. The final section concludes. Such examination seeks to culminate the case for the benefits of a *pragmatic capability approach*.

2. Freedom

An important place is dedicated to freedom by the CA and pragmatism. Although the former has by and large elaborated on it more than the latter, they have both discussed it. There is recognition of its value, to different extents, by these frameworks. To account for the differences and coincidences, and hint towards fertile soil for convergence, this section presents each approach's take on the issue.

Freedom lies at the very core of the CA. Together with achievements, it constitutes the evaluative space where the approach suggests assessments of social states should take place (Sen 2009, 1999, 1992, 1990, 1988). It is fundamental for the approach because, by encompassing options from which an individual has the opportunity to choose, it conveys the message that outcomes are not the only thing that matters. Sen (2009, p. 227) states "In assessing our lives, we have reason to be interested not only in the kind of lives we manage to lead, but also in the freedom that we actually have to choose between different styles and ways of living". Were achievements, or the doings and beings people value, the only things of value, it would not make a difference the circumstances under which they come about. For instance, by getting married a couple may attain the functioning of emotional fulfillment. However, it stands to reason that it would make a difference if their marriage is the product of their considered choice or if it was entirely arranged by someone else.

This, of course, does not to minimize the importance of achievements. Functionings, the types of life that a person enjoys, are significant as well. They are constitutive to a person's being (Sen 1990). Additionally, they express an individual's notion of the good, i.e. their morality. Therefore, functionings and capability are complementary. Moreover, in certain

situations, focusing on achievements instead of capability, may be more adequate. For example, in cases where the interest is evaluating detrimental outcomes or deprivations, which plausibly ensue against a person's will (Robeyns 2005). In these cases, it is not lack of information regarding capability (one of the most important challenges for their evaluation) that leads to the focus on functionings, it is that it makes more sense to do so. Such possibility has been acknowledged by Sen (1985, 1988) with the inclusion of 'refined functionings' or, alternatively, with the inclusion of achieved functionings but also include choosing as one relevant functioning. "'[C]hoosing' itself can be seen as a valuable functioning, and having an x when there is no alternative may be sensibly distinguished from choosing x when substantital alternatives exist" (Sen 1999, p. 76).

In this sense, Sen (1997) differentiates between 'culmination outcomes' and 'comprehensive outcomes'. The former refer to a narrow conception of opportunity which can focus exclusively on what an individual 'ends up with', omitting from the analysis the options available and the freedom to choose (Sen 2009). The latter offers a broader notion of opportunity and incorporates, alternatively, the manner in which culminations occurr, paying attention, for instance, to the process of choice. Opportunity to achieve comprehensive outcomes, for example, factors in whether a state came about via a person's own volition and choice or by influence or coercion from others[55]. As such, in his later work Sen (2009) stresses that comprehensive outcomes attach culminations to the intervening processes, agencies and relations in the conception of opportunity.

What is more, the CA's analysis of freedom emphasizes its composing aspects. Sen (2009, 1999) finds that there are two relevant aspects. First, an expansion of freedom increases the opportunity people have to pursue their goals or the ability they have to choose to lead the lives that they find valuable. The emphasis here is on people's opportunity to decide and achieve their aims irrespective of the process governing their coming about. Second, freedom also refers to the process in which those choices are made. The concern here is to evaluate whether the conditions leading to a choice include some kind of coercion or not. Hence, Sen (1999) has highlighted the 'opportunity aspect' and the 'process aspect' of freedom[56].

[55] One can imagine two people, who value the same kind of live and enjoy the achievement of the same levels of doings and beings, but if these were imposed on one while the other had other options to choose from, it is clear that the latter enjoys a better quality of life. In this sense, focusing on outcomes only may be insufficient.

[56] To a certain extent this discussion is related to the distinction between negative and positive freedoms (see Sen 1988). Negative freedoms refer to the absence of hindrances to the exercise of choice. As such,

This differentiation is relevant to discuss capability, used as a synonym to freedom in the literature[57]. A person's ability to choose what they value is certainly important. However, it is no less relevant for people to have the ability to determine what they deem valuable. Therefore, freedom encompasses the latter as well. Opportunity freedom, conceived broadly as being concerned with comprehensive outcomes, includes both elements: the ability to choose from valuable alternatives and the ability to determine what is valuable. This is at least partly why the CA emphasizes that capability refers to the potential doings and beings (types of life) that people value and have *reason* to value, with emphasis on the reasoning. Hence, "[t]he concept of capability is thus linked closely with the opportunity aspect of freedom, seen in terms of 'comprehensive' opportunities, and not just focusing on what happens at 'culmination'" (Sen 2009, p. 232).

Thus, the importance of rationality for freedom is underscored. According to Sen's (2002) redefinition of rationality as reasoning, the scrutiny of one's choices, aims and values, rationality is dependent on freedom in two senses. On the one hand, there must be available options to exercise reason before choice. On the other hand, when various options are available, rationality must be able to accommodate the diversity of reasons and preferences supporting a choice, which is crucial for the idea of freedom of thought. Additionally, there is arguably a third way in which rationality is dependent on freedom, namely, learning. Each effective choice opportunity is an occasion to act rationally, i.e. to subject preferences to reasoned scrutiny. That being so, choosing enables a learning process, regardless of whether choices turn out to be optimal or not, which can be useful in order to make future choices better.

Freedom is also dependent on rationality. Accounting for freedom demands awareness of preferences and values as well as reasons for them. For Sen (2002, p. 5), "freedom must depend on reasoned assessment of having different options". This seems to apply to the opportunity aspect and the process aspect of freedom. While the former refers mainly to the individual, the latter is mostly associated with the collective, which are closely interrelated themselves.

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they depict the state of 'being free from.' The attention here is placed on the appropriateness of the processes ruling social conduct. Positive freedoms, in turn, focus on the effective opportunity people have to achieve. Thus, they denote the state of 'being free to.' The emphasis here is on meaningful exercises of choice.

[57] In fact, as has been repeatedly mentioned, Sen (1999) himself defines development in terms of freedom.

This leads to the importance of social conversion factors for freedom. Sen (1992) has argued that the actual freedom of an individual to pursue their valued ends depends on: i) the ends that they have; and, ii) the power they have to convert resources or means into the achievement of those ends. Both aspects, in turn, are dependent on social context. The first can be elaborated by way of rationality. Not only are preferences and values dependent on society, reasoning depends on society as well. It has been argued that society influences (albeit does not determine) what counts as rational or reasonable. This means that the reasoned assessment of options, on which freedom hinges, is shaped by social conversion factors, affecting freedom itself.

> To note the role of 'thinking, choosing and doing' by individuals is just the beginning of recognizing what actually does happen (we do, of course, as individuals, think about issues and choose and perform actions), but we cannot end there without an appreciation of the deep and pervasive influence of society on our 'thinking, choosing and doing'. When someone thinks and chooses and does something, it is, for sure, that person – and not someone else – who is doing these things. But it would be hard to understand why and how he or she undertakes these activities without some comprehension of his or her societal relations (Sen 2009, p. 245).

Second, the power individuals have to convert means into ends depends on social conversion factors. Societal norms and customs can facilitate or hinder this translation. Patriarchic, racist, or xenophobic institutions, institutions, can considerably curtail the power of women, ethnic minorities, and migrants, respectively. This also points to the interrelation between social and personal conversion factors and how freedom depends on both.

In this sense, capabilities highlight human plurality. There are a myriad aims that people may value and have reason to value. Being irreducibly diverse, capabilities are incommensurable (Sen 2009). From perhaps evident ones like being literate and well-nourished to rather particular ones like learning a specific skill in order to pursue one's interests, there is a wide array of combinations of functionings making up legitimate lives that individuals can lead. Sen (1992) has referred to this diversity as inter-end variation. Further, they can be associated to the aspects denoting motivation, namely, well-being

(self-regarding) or agency (the totality of a person's) goals. Importantly, emphasis should be placed on the fact that, because of its focus on the things that make life worthwhile, capability necessarily entails the *combinations* of functionings, not only the freedom to choose single ones. This is because situations of depravation can entail trade-offs among important functionings (Sen 2009), e.g. between avoiding infection in the midst of a pandemic by staying at home or leaving the house to work (informally) to earn enough to survive.

Given the inherent concern of the CA for human plurality, selection and valuation of capabilities cannot be simply made by experts or technocrats. Because by definition they deal with people's lives, those decisions have to be made by those who have a stake on the matter.

By the same token, a definite all-purpose list of capabilities cannot be proposed. Although some capabilities can be deemed less or more important than others, for the CA, the relevant ones depend on substantial and practical grounds. The latter refer to information or data availability. The former refer to the fact that the selection of capabilities and the imposition of weights cannot be defined *a priori* but depend on the exercise and the questions being addressed. Importantly, based on the CA's notion of agency, this entails the inclusion of those affected (Sen 1999). It is people themselves who have to decide on which capabilities are relevant and how relevant they are. As such, both selection and valuation are necessarily a process that has to take in the public sphere by dint of personal and public discussion and reasoning.

Finally, in his later work, Sen (2009) stresses that freedom implies duties as well. For him, capability, with its inherent notion of agency, entails effective power, and this elicits responsibility.

> Freedom in general and agency freedom in particular are parts of an effective power that a person has, and it would be a mistake to see capability, linked with these ideas of freedom, only as a notion of human advantage: it is also a central concern in understanding our obligations (Sen 2009, p. 271).

Consequently, although for the CA choice has intrinsic value, it is not the only valuable aspect. The broader notion of opportunity freedom, particularly in Sen's later work,

encompassing also the process governing choices, reflects as much. At the same time, the elaboration carried out indicates that choice holds a privileged position for the CA, suggesting that it equates choice to freedom (even if narrowly defined). Indeed, despite arguing in favor encompassing the opportunity and process aspects of freedom, Sen (2005), in discussing what the capability perspective cannot do, has acknowledged that the approach is clearly better equipped to account for the former than the latter.

> While the idea of capability has considerable merit in the assessment of the opportunity aspect of freedom, it cannot possibly deal adequately with the process aspect of freedom, since capabilities are characteristics of individual advantages, and they fall short of telling us enough about the fairness or equity of the processes involved, or about the freedom of citizens to invoke and utilise procedures that are equitable (Sen 2005, pp. 155-156).

As rich as the CA's account of freedom is, there seems to be room for further enrichment. Within the framework, the explanation for freedom itself could warrant additional attention. The important issues of what it entails and on what it depends are addressed in detail but what it is (a given? an inherent feature of humans?) less so. Pragmatism could contribute to complement the CA in this regard.

Also, the CA's interdependence of freedom and rationality hints to limitations. The importance of choice for freedom entails the latter's dependence on rationality (Sen 2002), as reasoning. That is, freedom depends on a person's capacity to scrutinize their values and choices. This suggests that freedom may apply best to sufficiently healthy and abled adults, since those who have others choosing and making that scrutiny or reasoning for them, such as children, people with mental disabilities, or the elderly, seem to be unaccounted for. The additional recognition that reasoning is a matter of degree depending on internal conversion factors does not fully encompass such cases. Until 1992, Sen criticized the idea of 'freedom as control' as severely limited, arguing that "Many freedoms take the form of our ability to get what we value and want, without the levers of control being *directly* operated by us" (Sen 1992, p. 64, emphasis in the original). Sen (1992) further made the distinction between 'instrumental agency success' and 'realized agency success', related 'freedom as control' to the former, and advocated the latter associating it to the idea of 'effective freedom'. 'Realized agency success' could account, somewhat, for those groups but it has been dropped thereafter. This suggests, perhaps

unsurprisingly in light of the discussion above, that capabilitarian freedom does not oppose freedom as control anymore or even embraces it. As in the case of agency, to account for such groups, the pragmatic perspective can prove useful.

Pragmatism's account of freedom takes a different approach. Its notion of freedom stems from its focus on action and its naturalistic philosophy. All things and organisms are conceived as having inclinations towards certain actions, referred to as 'selective behavior' or 'preferential action', which constitutes evidence of a rudimentary uniqueness or individuality in things (Dewey 1998a). Human choice builds on this behavior or action, since it affects the human organism as well due to the continuity existing in nature. To be sure, this is not what choice is, but it is at least part of it. At the same time, pragmatism's notion of transaction[58] establishes the scope and limits of freedom in terms of action, i.e. as acting according to choice. Because the human organism is constantly transacting with an environment (Dewey and Bentley 1949), freedom as action is enabled or constraint by the latter.

As such, pragmatism establishes a critique of what Dewey (1998a) considers the two main traditions ruling the idea of freedom, namely, freedom as choice and freedom as power to act. Even though they are quite different, they also seem to be related. From a pragmatic perspective, each of them is found to be faulty because of one characteristic they share: their assumption that freedom emerges in humanity due to some exceptionality or innate characteristic, which isolates it from the rest of nature and for which there is no explanation.

Concerning freedom as choice, pragmatism considers this treatment as distant from human experience. Dewey (1998a) is wary of the primacy of choice in the concept of freedom, let alone their equalization. The idea of freedom is conceived as evidence of humanity's desire to 'dignify choice' by placing it at the center of its morality.

[58] Dewey seems to use the term 'interaction' throughout his work until his later contribution with Bentley (1949), where he argues in favour of the term 'transaction' (and rejects interaction) to account for the relation and dynamics between organism and environment in a way more consistent with pragmatism's notion of experience. Nevertheless, the literature has used both interchangeably, attributing the implications of 'transaction' to 'interaction'. Therefore, as in the previous chapter, in this chapter, that practice is maintained and, in the discussion regarding pragmatism, they are considered as synonyms, unless otherwise stated.

> There is an inexpugnable feeling that choice is freedom and that man without choice is a puppet, and that man then has no acts which he can call his very own. Without genuine choice, choice that when expressed in action makes things different from what they otherwise would be, men are but passive vehicles through which external forces operate. This feeling is neither self-explanatory nor self-justificatory (Dewey 1998a, p. 302)

The focus on choice is related to the notion of freedom of will. For Dewey (1998a), the necessity to hold people accountable for their acts, particularly for their wrongdoings prompted this association. Punishment could only be executed on the basis of personal responsibility, not for things that people could not help doing or being. Choice, therefore, is caused by will, which has the power of indifferent choice. That is, will is truly free to opt for whatever option, unrestricted or unconstraint by anything whether inside or outside the chooser. In Dewey's (1998a, p. 303) words, "it is equally free to choose one way or another unmoved by any desire or impulse, just because of a causal force residing in will itself".

For pragmatism, however, this strategy turns out to be futile. By attributing to will the authorship and ultimate cause of choice, responsibility for action is assigned to a force antecedently given that seems outside of concrete individuals. This is because will, so described, is unaffected by the history and trajectory of people. In other words, the chooser is not the author of their choice. Therefore, it becomes nonsensical to determine someone's liability to punishment.

Pragmatism places consequences above antecedents. Thus, freedom is neither will nor choice because freedom is what it does, not what causes it. This perspective opposes the idea of freedom being attached to something given in advance, not subject to change. To the contrary, since it focuses on action, it assumes constant change. In this light, choice is seen as a preference. It is not a premade more salient preference among others but the formation of a new preference that emerges from the conflicting ones as an agent engages with the environment. This engagement, as conveyed by the pragmatic notion of transaction, entails the agent's biases. To the extent that a person's life-history as well their intelligent insights and foresight are employed, thus, choice signals a capacity for changing preferences deliberately.

In respect to freedom as power to act, the pragmatic perspective is skeptical of a focus on negative freedom. Freedom, as power to act in accordance with choice, follows the Liberal classic tradition and John Locke's ideas. It refers to the ability to execute choices, to carry out desires and purposes. That ability is hindered by laws and institutions. At best they pose mere challenges, at worst they cause oppression and enslavement. In this sense, freedom becomes a standard innate characteristic in humanity, a given equally distributed among all people, the exercise of which is determined by external conditions. The implication is that the mere removal of those restrictions and interferences suffices in order for full freedom to flourish. This perspective is rejected by Dewey (1998a, p. 306-307), who states:

> The real fallacy lies in the notion that individuals have such a native or original endowment of rights, powers and wants that all that is required on the side of institutions and laws is to eliminate the obstructions they offer to the "free" play of the natural equipment of individuals.

For pragmatism, actual rights, wants and powers are not found in human nature but are the result of human transaction. As such, they depend on relevant aspects of concrete individuals such as education and command over resources. Equalization of institutions (or their abolition) cannot equalize freedom for all irrespective of differences and asymmetries in these aspects. That approach would not benefit all but only those with an already advantageous position.

Hence, pragmatism takes issue with the Liberal tradition. Its focus on negative freedom or 'freedom of' is not sufficient. Dewey (1998a, p. 307) is emphatic when he states "The only possible conclusion, both intellectually and practically, is that the attainment of freedom conceived as power to act in accord with choice depends upon positive and constructive changes in social arrangements".

Pragmatic freedom seems closer to freedom as power to act, in the sense of freedom denoting what people *can* actually do. The constraints and enablements in the environments are incorporated in this notion as they affect what individuals can in effect do. This idea resonates with pragmatic transaction and builds on Spinoza's work, which regards humans as parts of the whole of nature, with very little power initially in their original state. Every action of one part of the whole is limited by the actions and

counteractions of the other parts, i.e. all actions are caught in a network of interactions[59] (Dewey 1998a). Pragmatic freedom could, therefore, be seen as the power to *transact*.

Consequently, freedom is not a given but something that can change, grow or decline. Not an original possession, it is an attainment. It can be attained not by the abolition of institutions and social habits but by their creation and the constant and active participation of all in the maintenance and promotion of those that can advance human action. Humans, exercising their (trans)agency, have the ability to influence the constant change taking place between them and their environments (Dewey and Bentley 1949), including their social structures, which are in fact the result and product of that social transaction[60].

As has been reiterated throughout this dissertation, pragmatism focuses on action. Therefore, it questions the primacy of choice in the debate regarding freedom. From a pragmatic perspective choice would not be relevant unless it is executed in outward action which makes a difference in the world. Similarly, human action as power is valued because it is not the action of things, but intelligent action, i.e. action with purpose, concerned with its consequences. Institutions or social customs and habits that contribute to better anticipate the consequences of preferences (i.e. intelligent preferences), the consequences of choice, and thus contribute to freedom. Accordingly, there seems to be a relation between freedom as choice and freedom as action. Intelligent choice enlarges the scope of action and this enlargement gives the individual greater insight and foresight, making choice more intelligent (Dewey 1998a).

As a consequence, despite choices being intelligent, they are not always optimal. There is, nonetheless, always a learning possibility. Failures can lead to better choices, that is, more intelligent or reflective choices and better doing. This learning process is in itself valuable as it contributes to an individual's growth as an intelligent human being, which is a gain that cannot be outweighed by failure (Dewey 1998a). Since intelligent preferences and choices entail reasoning and learning from prior experiences as well, for pragmatism, there is a close relationship between freedom and reasoning.

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[59] "If a man acts upon his private impulse, appetite or want and upon his private judgment about the aims and measures of conduct, he is just as much a subjected part of an infinitely complex whole as is a stock or stone" (Dewey 1998a, p. 307).

[60] "[Dewey] saw that we never begin anew, from scratch, from nothing. We either sustain the inherited forms or we transform them, purposefully and intelligently, whimsically and stupidly, coercively or cooperatively" (Manicas 2017, p. 278).

Since pragmatism acknowledges choice's potential to change preferences, it also underscores freedom as a person's capacity to be different, to change. Organisms are always becoming, and individuals are always emergent, therefore, freedom is the capacity humans have to be (and do, for things are what they do) according to their intelligent preferences. Moreover, this capacity is concrete and situated socially and historically. This points to the relevance of the environment for freedom. Social conditions can facilitate or hider the actualization of freedom. The extent to which they enable that actualization depends on intelligence of preferences, which are a person's individuality. "Freedom has too long been thought of as an indeterminate power operating in a closed and ended world. In its reality, freedom is a resolute will operating in a world in some respects indeterminate, because open and moving toward a new future" (Dewey 1998a, p. 314). Therefore, freedom is an attainment produced by transaction.

One freedom lies at the core of actual freedom: freedom of thought. Like all freedoms, it can be cultivated and, in fact, demands conscious and constant care. Against assumptions that thinking is a natural capacity of all humans, pragmatism emphasizes that it can and should be trained in order to further action (Dewey 1910). Significantly, this training has to empower people to learn autonomously and think critically (Putnam 2017). For pragmatism, issues such as freedom and democracy cannot be decided by experts but by people in their transaction with theirs contexts (Manicas 2017), employing their intelligence.

This training and the exercise of choice itself can lead to the generation of habits. Intelligent choice requires reflection, i.e. intelligent preferences. As such, a process is internalized by the agent, the same choice requires less consciousness, insofar as it continues furthering action, leading to the generation of individual habits. Additionally, the latter are influenced by social habits and customs. In this sense, both influence the actualization of freedom.

Habits, nonetheless, can be produced in different ways. As disposition of action (Hildebrand 2008), they are not solely the product of internalized reflective action but, to a far greater extent, of imitation of social habits, a process that starts in childhood (Dewey, 1946).

> An individual usually acquires the morality as he inherits the speech of his social group. The activities of the group are already there, and some assimilation of his own acts to their pattern is a pre requisite of a share therein, and hence of having any part in what is going on. [...] There is no miracle in the fact that if a child learns any language he learns the language that those about him speak and teach, especially since the ability to speak that language is a pre-condition of his entering into effective connection with them, making wants known and getting them satisfied. (Dewey 1930, pp. 58-59).

Pragmatism considers there is a continuity in behavior and the level of cognition therein. From primitive reflexes, to habits, to reflective intelligence (Baldwin 1988), action in nature (including human beings) is a matter of degree. As such, this perspective can account for human conduct throughout people's lifetime, including their growth and decay, and not focus solely on sufficiently heathy and abled adults, presumably the most likely to act reflectively, or to choose and reason.

As this section has sought to show, there is considerable agreement between the notions of freedom of the CA and pragmatism. Of particular importance is their resonance in going beyond the exclusive focus on either negative freedoms or choice, the influence of social factors, and the relation between freedom and reasoning. At the same time, there seems to be some disagreement in the treatment given to choice itself. For the CA, choice holds a privileged position, conveying the notion effective or substantive freedom. Pragmatism also has choice in high regard but does not equate freedom to choice, the latter being regarded only a cause of the former. Instead, the pragmatic view puts consequences above antecedents and defines things according to what they do. Thus, freedom, as the power to transact, is an attainment that allows individuals to change, to be and act differently. Regarding freedom as an attainment resonates with the CA and can be a promising commonality between the frameworks, and fertile on which to build.

Additionally, as in the case of agency, although both frameworks relate choice to reflective action, pragmatism bases its account of behavior on the continuity entailed by its naturalistic philosophy. This can be particularly important to account for those whose reasoning can be incipient or impaired and have others choosing for them, e.g. children, the elderly, and people with mental disabilities.

3. Democracy

The discussion above leads to the questions: which capabilities and/or functionings, and what action? There is coincidence between the CA and pragmatism in how to tackle this issue: participation and democracy. Even though their destination may seem to coincide, their journeys appear to differ. This section, therefore, elaborates how each framework regards democracy suggesting both similarities and dissimilarities, as well as lessons to be learnt.

The CA acknowledges that the issues, including capabilities, with which it is concerned pose a challenge. Sen (1992) asserts that well-being is an admittedly broad and partly opaque concept, and aiming to provide a complete ranking without room for ambiguity and incompleteness not only goes against the nature of these concepts but also runs the risk of overprecision. From this perspective, no 'complete ordering' of meaningful ends can be suggested.

There are at least three reasons to reject a one-size-fits all approach. First, capabilities depend on the purposes of the exercise. Which capabilities are relevant as well as how relevant the different capabilities are cannot be detached from the objective and justification of the application.

Second, empirical applications ought to take into consideration that the reality studied and the social conditions and priorities that capabilities seek to advance can vary. Any given list, comprising the doings and beings that people value and have reason to value (which are constitutive of their beings), ought to reflect those people's conception of the good and ought to be the product of those people's exercise of agency. The shape that a list should take is a matter best left for the public sphere (Sen 1999). As such, they have to be selected by those affected, according to their reflected-upon valued dimensions. This is because of inter-end diversity or the fact that different types of life can be legitimately deemed as valuable after reflection by different people. At the same time, different people in different contexts may produce different valuations because of those differences, or inter-individual variation.

Therefore, for the CA, all stakeholders should take part in the selection and valuation of freedoms and/or functionings. Selection and valuation of the latter is an inescapable

exercise and it cannot be carried out away from the interested parties. This applies to research endeavors as well as public policy.

Third, even in the case of given social conditions, public reasoning and deliberation can contribute to a better understanding of the scope, limitations and overall importance of different capabilities. A fixed list of capabilities would "deny the possibility of progress in social understanding and also go against the productive role of public discussion, social agitation, and open debates" (Sen 2004, p. 80). In this sense, what has been criticized as underspecification is in fact taking free agency seriously. Consequently, the capability perspective is not only "inescapably pluralist" (Sen 1999, p. 76) but necessarily democratic.

In this sense, Sen (2004, p. 78) has forcefully stated:

> What I am against is the fixing of a cemented list of capabilities, which is absolutely complete (nothing could be added to it) and totally fixed (it could not respond to public reasoning and to the formation of social values). I am a great believer in theory. The theory of evaluation and assessment does, I believe, have the exacting task of pointing to the relevance of what we are free to do and free to be (the capabilities in general), as opposed to the material goods we have and the commodities we can command. But pure theory cannot "freeze" a list of capabilities for all societies for all time to come, irrespective of what the citizens come to understand and value. That would be not only a denial of the reach of democracy, but also a misunderstanding of what pure theory can do, completely divorced from the particular social reality that any particular society faces.

Sen's conception of democracy is not that associated to public balloting but that related to public discussion. His position builds on the CA's notion of agency, specially the reasoning agent, and follows the Rawlsian view of democracy as the exercise of public reason (Sen 2009). According to this idea, the principal characteristic of a deliberative democracy is deliberation itself. This entails the exchange of arguments and reasons among citizens in support of their positions regarding political issues. That being so, democracy as balloting depends crucially on public reason.

As such, democracy as public reason underscores three important aspects: political participation, dialogue, and public interaction (Sen 2009). The engagement of the public in political issues in necessary for democracy as it is the basis of placing power on the people. Politics itself refers to the ruling or governing to that which is public and, thus, demands an active participation of all members of the public on the decision related to that governing.

This participation is dialogical or discursive because different positions and interests are expressed, questioned and supported by arguments and reasons. There is an element of persuasion implied. Providing reasons not only seeks to legitimize people's positions but also convince others of them. Accordingly, the process contributes to the formation of preferences or reasoned value formation (Sen 2009). By so doing different camps can increase the number of people who share their views.

Finally, this exchange requires social interaction in order to take place. All parties ought to have equal opportunity to voice their interests and, eventually, vote their convictions. This avoids one-sidedness in the discussion or the dialogue (perhaps better understood as a polylogue) becoming a monologue. As Sen (2009, p. 336, emphasis in the original) asserts "[I]nformed and unregimented *formation of values* requires openness of communication and argument".

These aspects highlight the relevance that Sen places on agency for democracy. As important as institutions are, whether or not democracy fulfils its promise does not depend on them but on the behavior of the public, their participation, dialogue and interaction[61].

Hence, for the CA democracy (as public reason) is an end but also a means to other ends. Democracy is an end because it can safeguard the interest of different groups, particularly the most vulnerable. In a very sensitive issue for him, Sen (1999) stresses how famines have not occurred in democratic states. It is the mechanism by which decisions about public in general and capabilities in particular should be made. Certainly, each of the aspects of democracy mentioned require capabilities in order for it to work. For instance, public participation may need freedom of information, public dialogue freedom of

[61] "The working of democratic institutions, like that of all other institutions, depends on the activities of human agents in utilizing opportunities for reasonable realization" (Sen 2009, p. 354).

expression, and public interaction freedom of association. Additionally, not only is democracy an end in itself, it is also regarded as a relevant means. Sen (2009, p. 348) stresses that "Attention must be paid to the extensive evidence that democracy and political and civil rights tend to enhance freedoms of other kinds (such as human security) through giving a voice, at least in many circumstances, to the deprived and the vulnerable."

As this discussion suggests, by and large, democracy for the CA pertains to the level of society, the nation or the state. The approach's concern with minorities and its subscription to ethical individualism (more on this in the next section) could suggest that democracy as public reason may also be applicable at lower levels or smaller units such as groups or families. This seems like a relevant issue, however, it appears to be absent in the main contributions of the CA. Pragmatism's account of democracy may be of service here as well.

In the case of pragmatism, since it is concerned with furthering action, the relevant question pertains to 'which action' is to be advanced. The pragmatic perspective does not endorse particular ends or outcomes but provides procedures to answer such questions. "Pragmatism is a method only" and it "does not stand for any special results" (James in Dieleman, Rondel and Voparil 2017, p. 3). The method, usually referred to as the 'scientific method' due to pragmatism's support of it, entails two elements: experimental inquiry, and free and full discussion (Putnam 2017). Therefore, this is a question not to be answered *a priori* but in experience. The shape that action takes depends on specific problems[62] or indeterminate situations where action is hindered, which prompt inquiry to generate belief that can overcome the hindrance or doubt, making the situation determinate anew. Agents define problems and solutions as part of their transaction with their contexts. Hence, the answer to que question 'which action?' is a public affair to be determined democratically.

Dewey has written extensively on the issue of democracy and has provided multiple understandings. It has been referred to *inter alia* as 'a way of life' (Dewey 1998b), a fighting faith (Dewey 1963), radical (Dewey 1998c), a name for a life of free and enriching

[62] "Unlike the famous rationalists, for whom philosophy begins with disinterested contemplation, and unlike the famous empiricists, for whom it begins with passively receiving sensory stimuli, pragmatists believe that thinking and inquiry are fundamentally occasioned by problems. Problems spur us into action" (Dieleman, Rondel and Voparil 2017, p. 5)

communion (Dewey 1946), or a method for settling conflicting claims (1963). Despite their apparent differences, they are all consistent with the pragmatic project, as the discussion below elaborates.

For Dewey (1946), there is a difference between democracy as a social idea and a system of government. These are related, mainly because they entail human relationships, but are distinct. In Dewey's work, political democracy (i.e. system of government) seems to be an instance of the broader idea of democracy. Therefore, this discussion addresses the latter as it encompasses all levels of human group life. Dewey (1946, p. 143) posits:

> The idea of democracy is a wider and fuller idea than can be exemplified in the state even at its best. To be realized it must affect all modes of human association, the family, the school, industry, religion. And even as far as political arrangements are concerned, governmental institutions are but a mechanism for securing to an idea channels of effective operation.

Thus, the pragmatic account of democracy starts with action and can be accounted for in naturalistic terms. Being social action, its primitive fact is found in association. Humans are drawn to each other as it is the nature of all organisms. Their mere joint activity, however, does not distinguish them from other entities. What differentiates human group life is its ability to form communities, which requires volition and intelligence[63]. This is more than aggregated collective action. It is shared intelligent conjoint action. That is, a community is formed when members share perceptions of the consequences of combined action and these perceptions become objects of desire prompting action (Dewey 1946). As such, a community conveys the notion of democracy.

> Regarded as an idea, democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself. […] Wherever there is conjoint activity whose consequences are appreciated as good by all singular persons who take part in it, and where the realization of the good is such as to effect an energetic desire and effort to sustain it in being just because it is a good shared by all, there

[63] "Associated or joint activity is a condition of the creation of a community. But association itself is physical and organic, while communal life is moral, that is emotionally, intellectually, consciously sustained. Human beings combine in behavior as directly and unconsciously as do atoms, stellar masses and cells; as directly and unknowingly as they divide and repel" (Dewey 1946, 151).

> is in so far a community. The clear consciousness of a communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the idea of democracy (1946, p. 148-149)

Since action is social action, problems are social problems, and solutions are social as well. Agents within communities perceive a situation as indeterminate and engage in inquiry in order to make it determinate. That being so, this inquiry is a shared collective one. In this process, if shared belief is to be generated to make the situation determinate, all stakeholders are to be involved. Such action is referred to as conjoint action. Dewey (1946, pp. 84-85) states:

> Conjoint, combined, associated action is a universal trait of the behavior of things. Such action has results. Some of the results of human collective action are perceived, that is, they are noted in such ways that they are taken account of. Then there arise purposes, plans, measures and means, to secure consequences which are liked and eliminate those which are found obnoxious. Thus perception generates a common interest; that is, those affected by the consequences are perforce concerned in conduct of all those who along with themselves share in bringing about the results.

What is more, because people are members of a community, pragmatism regards the purpose of democracy as harnessing the full potential of human experience for social problem-solving. This entails employing collective intelligence to the solution of social problems. Only by the sharing of intelligence of all participants, i.e. the ability of individuals to adequately infer future consequences from present signs (Dewey 1917), can democracy achieve that goal. Since each individual, as a transagent, is situated in a specific position, each enjoys some part of the socially distributed knowledge and can potentially contribute to enrich the process. The *demos*, the public, becomes a problem-solving entity and democracy is the mechanism by which the full potential of human experience (individual and collective) can be harnessed in order to solve problematic situations (Talisse 2017).

On that account, pragmatism objects to placing the burden or the responsibility of solving solely on experts or technocrats, or any single group for that matter. Because of pragmatism's promotion of the scientific method in general and its employment to solve social problems in particular, it may be inferred that experts hold a special position. That

would be a misunderstanding in light of pragmatic transaction and its emphasis on people's inevitable biases. Dewey (in Putnam 2017, p. 256) has explicitly stated "A class of experts is inevitably so removed from common interests as to become a class with private interests and private knowledge, which in social matters is not knowledge at all". Experts are certainly a part of the collective and their participation is valuable, as valuable as that of any other member of the collective.

The application of the full resources of human experience to solving social problems entails an ever-growing process. Because this process mobilizes the intelligence of individuals and the latter, as has been stressed above, can be trained (Dewey 1998a), the full potential of human experience requires that training. Thus, education is a precondition for democracy. Furthermore, this education has to focus on empowering people. Instead of teaching people their place or to defer to experts, it must aim at constructing autonomous learners and critical thinkers[64] (Putnam 2017). This is essential to the democratic project since "the task of democracy is forever that of creation of a freer and more humane experience in which all share and to which all contribute" (Dewey 1998b, p. 343).

As a consequence, for democracy, human experience is the end as well as the means. This is what pragmatism means by democracy as 'a way of life'. It conveys the confidence on human beings to think and act intelligently, provided adequate conditions (Dewey 1998b). That confidence or faith in human nature governs human action, from the most mundane deeds to the most impactful ones. People voluntarily, jointly and intelligently act towards furthering human improvement.

Hence, social institutions, customs, and habits, particularly those related to education, have to be oriented in that direction. Should they not be, they require reform. From families to the central government, they need to be revised by the very people that constitute them. Individually and jointly, as agents accepting their responsibility, it is up to them to figure out the reform required and the manner in which it is to be implemented. "Social progress is neither an accident nor a miracle; it is the sum of efforts made by individuals whose actions are guided by intelligence" (Dewey in Manicas 2017, p. 278).

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[64] "The extent to which we take the commitment to democracy seriously is measured by the extent to which we take the commitment to education seriously" (Putnam H 2017, p. 263).

Social institutions and habits, therefore, are fallible, even democratic ones. They may serve current social purposes but may prove useless in the future, just like past institutions have lost their validity. As in the case of any belief, they settle issues temporarily, until there are good reasons to dislodge that settlement. Institutions believed to promote equality, justice, or democracy now may hide undetected limitations. Currently unforeseen circumstances may challenge those institutions in the future questioning their usefulness. This is an inescapable implication of transaction, which offers a reminder that even if social inquiry can harness the full resources of human experience, applying intelligence to the solution of social problems, those solutions are still limited by the positions and situations of participants. Pragmatism's embrace of fallibility contributes to anticipating such possibilities and overcoming them.

Moreover, for the process of social inquiry to be democratic certain conditions constitutive of collective intelligence ought to be instantiated. They mainly refer to the equality that must be present in social transaction among participants and, thus, the recognition of their autonomy, the concomitant respect for each perspective and the willingness to engage in constructive dialogue. More specifically, these means have to be democratic themselves:

> Participants in social inquiry must interact as equals; they must be regarded by one another as autonomous; they must honor practices of nondomination, inclusion, and open-mindedness; they must work together to keep open and fluid the channels by which new information, new experiences, and new voices can be heard; and so on (Talisse 2017, p. 284).

Inequality is of the utmost importance for democracy. The existence of material and other inequalities that translate into unequal democratic participation can render a democracy hollow. Inequalities are a significant part of the context or environment constituting the transagent and, as such, it influences their ability to participate in a fully intelligent manner. In a scenario of asymmetrical democratic participation, some voices speak louder than others, some reasons more persuasive, some (im)positions received with less resistance. Under such conditions, a partial or pseudo social inquiry ensues, which reflects only the intelligence of a segment of society, the advantaged one. What Dewey (1998c) called bourgeois democracy, where the power rests solely in finance capitalism, is an

illustration. Social action on that basis is bound to further perpetuate the asymmetries (Talisse 2017).

Against this backdrop, as in the case of freedom, pragmatism advocates not only removing inequalities but creating and sustain the economic, social and political conditions that can safeguard social inquiry. Effecting such changes is what makes the ends of democracy radical because these are great challenges. Moreover, the challenge is also to generate them democratically. The inseparability of democratic ends and democratic means is what makes democracy radical. "*The fundamental principle of democracy is that the ends of freedom and individuality for all can be attained only by means that accord with those ends*" (Dewey 1998c, p. 338, emphasis in the original)

The issue of inequality brings the theme of justice[65] to the fore. Although pragmatism is concerned with injustices, it has not addressed directly the subject of justice (Manicas 2017; Talisse 2017). It has been argued that this may be due to i) the primacy of concrete injustices over abstract discussion; ii) skepticism regarding a priori theorizing; and, iii) a committmen to pluralism (Dieleman, Rondel and Voparil 2017). In light of the discussion regarding the preconditions of democracy and social inquiry, it seems like an important aspect warranting further elaboration.

Democracy occupies a privileged place in the CA and pragmatism and the differences between them seem to be outweighed by the coincidences. Although at first glance, they may seem offer different accounts, while the CA sees it as public reason, pragmatism regards it as a method for solving social problems, for both democracy constitutes a means as well as an end. Against the problem of selection and valuation of capabilities, the CA resorts to democracy. Additionally, the latter can contribute to other valuable achievements and capabilities. Further, by allowing decision-making by public reasoning and discussion, democracy is valuable intrinsically. For pragmatism, insofar as democracy is a precondition for adequate social inquiry, it is a means. Similarly, to the extent that social institutions and habits such as those related to education are preconditions for

[65] "Justice is the concept by means of which we examine questions of social inclusion, membership, entitlements to political participation, and the distribution of the material and social benefits and burdens of political association. Another way to put this point is to say that when we think of the social failure manifest in familiar practices of institutionalized social marginalization, exclusion, discrimination, and disadvantage, we reach for the concept of justice; we think these ills are not merely *bad*, they are *wrong*. And any society in which they are rampant and entrenched is not merely *in need of improvement*, but also *illegitimate*" (Talisse 2017, pp. 283-284).

democracy, it is an end. The CA and pragmatism seem to differ in the scope of the applicability of democracy. While the former seems to argue for its pertinence at level of society and the state (or beyond), pragmatism's notion of democracy encompasses all modes of human association, from the family to government. That being so, this framework not only makes sense empirically and normatively, but by so doing chimes with the CA's project.

4. Normativity

The CA and pragmatism are frameworks with inherent normative propositions. As in the cases previously discussed, they seem to find common ground despite the fact that their rationale differs. In this section, those coincidences and differences are explored and, from a pragmatic reading, a brief argument is made in favor of a current communion of pragmatism and the CA, which could be further enhanced by a pragmatic capability approach.

The CA as well as pragmatism adhere to consequentialism. The CA opposes the conventional focus on monetary indicators in the assessment of social states. These are best regarded as the means of development. Approaches with that emphasis, under the umbrella of resourcism in this discussion, place opulence, an aspect with only instrumental value, at the locus of attention. Sen (2009; 1999) has repeatedly supported this idea in the Aristotelian tradition, which states 'wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else'. Certainly, this also applies to other, more elaborate, alternatives such as Rawlsian primary goods, as well as basic needs approaches.

Instead, the CA is concerned with intrinsically valuable aspects, i.e. people and their quality of life. It does not, however, omit the value of the command over resources. It recognizes it to the extent it can lead to intrinsically valuable aspects of life. By so doing it focuses on the ends of development.

At the same time, although consequentialist, the CA does not adhere to utilitarianism. Due to its focus on all the aspects that make life worthwhile, the approach rejects single indicators favoring instead multidimensionality. Sen (2009, p. 240) has asserted "humankind should be able to face a bit more reality than a picture of a world in which

there is only one good thing". Moreover, because of its attention to human diversity, particularly captured in conversion factors, for the CA distributional issues and inequality are of the utmost importance. Finally, its differentiation between well-being and agency in human motivation widens the net from exclusive focus on utility as self-regarding goals leading to personal pleasure or satisfaction, to the inclusion of other-regarding objectives.

The ends with which the CA is concerned are expressed in functionings and capabilities. These are the achieved doings and beings people value and have reason to value, and the set of all possible options, respectively. Whether related to agency or well-being, as has been argued above, this is the evaluative space proposed on which assessments of individual or social states ought to take place. That is, the approach makes a stand on what it regards as worthy of attention and worthy of expansion.

The CA's focus on ends suggests it is interested in outcomes but, as mentioned above, these are 'comprehensive outcomes'. In addition to mere culmination or the strict ultimate result, comprehensive outcomes include the processes, agencies, and relations leading to them. A politician interested in winning an election but doing so fairly illustrates the difference (Sen 2002). The capabilitarian perspective is thereby enriched to move beyond a narrow view of consequentialism, interested solely in the aftermath, including other (deontological) concerns (Sen 2009). As Sen (2009, p. 221) asserts "Sensitivity to consequence does not demand insensitivity to agencies and relations in evaluating what is happening in the world".

In this sense, the CA is a proposal to deal with issues such as poverty, inequality and deprivation. In that undertaking, however, it does not aim for an ideal state. Rather, its approach is grounded on reality. Sen (2009, p. vii) posits that "What moves us, reasonably enough, is not the realization that the world falls short of being completely just – which few of us expect – but that there are clearly remediable injustices around us which we want to eliminate".

Whether capabilities or functionings, the CA suggests that assessments of states have to be made at the level of the individual. Thus, the CA adheres to ethical individualism (Sen 2009). This means that the ultimate unit of concern is the individual (Robeyns 2017). Alternatives, such as a focus on the community, a household or the family, could hide

deprivations and inequalities that can take place within them. Gender, age and other relevant aspects for discrimination may be obscured in collective units of analysis.

To be sure, the CA admits the possibility of collective capabilities, functionings and agency. However, the emphasis is on the individual because all of the later entail reasoning and, according to Sen (2009), this takes place at the level of the individual.

Accordingly, ethical individualism is not to be confused with ontological individualism. The CA seems to reject the ontological assumption that society and its properties can be reduced to individuals and their properties, since the latter are the only things that exist. The CA's acknowledgement of the possibility of a mutual influence between social institutions and people attests to this.

Development, as a normative concept, suggests the idea of progress, advancement, improvement (Alkire and Deneulin 2010), i.e. positive change (Chalmers 2004). For the CA that change ought to happen in the aforementioned spaces. Certainly, it does not suggest a specific desirable state of social affairs, it only argues in favor of where to look in order to find development. As such, development can (and does) take different shapes and shades of freedoms and achievements, which reflects the CA's recognition of multidimensionality, but freedoms and achievements they ought to be. As a result, although he does not suggest a predetermined ultimate list of capabilities and/or functionings, in fact he opposes it, Sen (1999) has not been shy about this proposal, suggesting in fact the redefinition of *development as freedom*.

Pragmatism is also consequentialist as it is concerned with practical consequences. By this, it means that it is interested in the consequences for action. For instance, the meaning of objects is to be expressed in terms of how they affect human action. In fact, the consequences for action something may have are considered as its meaning. Perhaps this is best illustrated by the pragmatic maxim:

> To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve – what sensation we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, whether immediate or remote, is then for us the whole of our

> conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all (James 1904, pp. 673-674).

Pragmatism challenges conventional philosophy and its attention to issues beyond social matters. As a result, from this perspective, knowledge production is relevant "[p]rimarily, persistingly and essentially for the sake of action" (Quinton 2010, p. 3). The pragmatic project is, therefore, to use philosophy's clarity to shed light on how to address social issues and contribute to their betterment. Put simply, pragmatism's aim is to address practical concerns putting philosophy at the service of human action. In Dewey's (1917) words: "Philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men".

Unlike the CA, pragmatism is much less clear about its implications for development issues. What is clear, however, is that furthering action can take different shapes depending on the matter at hand. Highlighting human plurality, this points to a wide array of dimensions, consideration for personal (organism) and contextual (environment) characteristics, and the inclusion of both self-regarding as well as other-regarding goals.

Although not directly addressed by pragmatism, since it is not a framework with which social states can be assessed, pragmatism arguably subscribes to ethical individualism as well. This can be inferred from the discussion regarding democracy. If social inquiry entails harnessing the full potential of human experience, this means that every single individual's intelligence matters. It would be difficult for pragmatic democracy to accept inequalities curtailing that potential, which can be obscured if the attention is placed on units of analysis that aggregate individuals. Therefore, even though action can take different shapes, and these are the product of public debate, it seems sensible for pragmatism to advocate for the advancement of action to be verified at the individual level.

Pragmatism's ethical individualism is also detached from ontological individualism. The notions of experience, habit, and transaction (emphasizing that all action is social action) should suffice to support the argument that, for pragmatism, society cannot be reduced to an aggregation of individuals and that explanations of society cannot be solely derived from individuals and their properties.

Concerning development itself, a different route is followed by pragmatism. Being a descriptive and normative term, development is a value-laden concept, means that it incorporates preferences. From this perspective, much like warranted assertions, norms and values enable action. As such, they are ubiquitous to human experience (Putnam 2002). Moreover, for pragmatism, the fact-value unity permeates all experience, including science. The term 'development' is an illustration of an inherently normative notion. As such, it is necessarily framed within a specific context of evaluation, theory or paradigm. Further, because values and preferences direct action, development is subject to social inquiry. Additionally, development's underlying values and preferences, like warranted assertions, are provisional in character and subject to constant change. Therefore, development is subject to constant change as well.

Hence, pragmatism does not propose a specific social state as desirable, which can conceivably be understood as the purpose of development. As such, it neither suggests an evaluative space on which assessments of individuals or societies could take place, nor does it endorse an approach that can answer that question. According to this perspective, such question cannot be answered *a priori* and away from a specific context in which a response is required in terms of action. This is because such doubt would be raised as human action in hindered under particular circumstances demanding an answer in order to further it anew. As a consequence, different situations can produce different answers.

Therefore, neither does pragmatism provide a definitive answer regarding what development is nor can one be inferred from it. Perhaps, at most, what could be said is that pragmatism would consider *development as (trans)action*. This seems to resonate with the CA's recognition of agency as intrinsically, instrumentally and constructively valuable. To be sure, pragmatism's and the CA's notions of agency evidence only partial coincidence. Therefore, to the extent that this is so, this could be a commonality on which to build as pragmatism complements the CA.

Importantly, a pragmatic reading of the capability approach could expose a promising avenue to further the plausibility of their combination. From this perspective, the CA arguably already seems to be furthering action. This appears to be the case because focusing on capability and functionings can certainly be regarded as one answer to the problem of 'development' and what it is. The increasing influence of the CA among scholars and practitioners, particularly evident in the Human Development Reports,

suggests as much. In fact, its use in both circles could conceivably be interpreted in pragmatic terms. The human development and capability approach[66] could be regarded as a warrantedly assertible proposition, as it seems to be able to solve the problem posed by the exclusive focus on opulence, and thereby, take development efforts further, for the time being. Insofar as the CA can incorporate such modesty in this regard, pragmatism would be amenable to maintain development as freedom, until there is good reason to prompt that inquiry anew.

5. Conclusions

Relevant themes for the CA and pragmatism have been discussed on this chapter. Building on the argument presented in the previous one regarding how the CA's agency can be enriched by pragmatic agency, it has sought to tackle issues derived from that argument, namely freedom, democracy and normativity. The elaboration has pointed to some of their agreements and disagreements, seeking to make the case for the potential benefits of a pragmatic capability approach.

For the CA, freedom is an evaluative space for assessments of social states, denoting the actual opportunity of people to be and do things they value and have reason to value. As such, it regards choice highly. Although, the CA broadens the notion of opportunity freedom to include also the process aspect of freedom, it seems to privilege choice as it conveys the notion of effective freedom. Also, despite its rich account of freedom, it is not clear what freedom is (a given? an inherent feature of humans?). At the same time, since freedom is dependent on rationality, understood as reasoning, the approach seems to restrict its application of freedom to those with the capacity to scrutinize their values and choices, i.e. sufficiently healthy and abled adults.

In this context, it has been argued that pragmatism can prove helpful to complement the CA. This perspective values choice highly but it does not equate it to freedom, since it is only its cause. The pragmatic view focuses on consequences and, therefore, regards freedom as the power to transact, an attainment that enables people to change, to be and act differently. As such, it can be trained and improved given the right context, which underscores the importance of freedom being the product of transaction and the need for

[66] "[…] there is no consensus as to a *conceptually* clear distinction between human development and the capability approach, nor is it obvious that such a distinction is useful or required" (Alkire, 2010: 22, emphasis in the original).

agents to foster that context. Freedom as an attainment resonates with the CA and can be a promising commonality between the frameworks, and fertile soil on which to sow. Additionally, the naturalistic approach characterizing pragmatism suggests a continuity in behavior from primitive reflexes, to habit to reflexive intelligence. In this sense, the pragmatic perspective can provide an account of human conduct that encompasses those acting both unreflectively and reflectively.

Concerning their shared commitment to plurality and democracy, it can be attributed to their regard of people as diverse agents. The CA does so by acknowledging that there are different legitimate types of life that a person might lead (inter-end variation), and that these may be affected by personal as well as contextual characteristic (inter-individual variation). Moreover, the CA seems to refer to democracy only at the level of society or the state, suggesting that lower level or smaller social units are outside its scope. Pragmatism, conversely, conceives of democracy broadly encompassing human association at all levels, from families to governments. As such, it offers lessons for the CA. Further, it considers democracy as a method to address social problems. Since (trans)action is social, problems and solutions as social as well. For problem-solving, social inquiry is required, a process in which all stakeholders are needed. Since people are embedded in their contexts, they share a part of social intelligence. Democracy, thus, harnesses the full potential of human experience to solve social problems via social inquiry. That potential depends on social context, particularly on inequalities. Although pragmatism is concerned with the latter and other concrete injustices, it has not addressed the issue of justice. This can be a theme where pragmatism could learn from the CA.

Finally, on the subject of normativity, both are consequentialist in different ways. The CA, located within the development literature, is concerned with people and their quality of life as ends of development, assessed in terms of capability and functionings. Pragmatism, as a philosophy, is much less specific, focusing on the practical consequences of objects, i.e. their influence in advancing human action.

Whereas the CA holds freedom and achievement as the evaluative spaces, pragmatism advances solely action. These are not incompatible positions, to the contrary. Pragmatism opposes absolutes and privileges instead that which furthers human action. Although their notions of agency only partially coincide, this seems to resonate with the CA's acknowledgement of agency as intrinsically, instrumentally and constructively valuable.

Additionally, the fact that the CA has proven to be an influential approach for scholars and practitioners alike suggests that both communities (relevant for the field of development) have concurred in its advantages to address doubt and, thereby, enable human action. Therefore, to the extent that the CA furthers the latter, a pragmatic capability approach can accommodate development as freedom.

By the same token, such a pragmatically enriched capability approach cannot constitute a definitive answer to the debate with the CA and it need not be so to advance the debate forward. As a potential warrantedly assertible proposal, it only aspires to contribute to settling provisionally the issues with which it has dealt. Until there are reasons to dislodge that settlement, until action may be restricted again, it can prove useful for both development research and practice. Taking Dewey's words for his project for philosophy, this proposal is 'at the same time modest and bold'.

Consequently, the discussion of freedom, democracy, and normativity seems to consolidate the argument in favor of the combination of the CA with pragmatism as a promising marriage. Most assuredly, the discussion presented in this chapter and the previous one neither exhausts all the themes warranting attention nor does it elaborate them exhaustively. Much more can be said in this regard, and hopefully will. Each of the themes briefly explored in the closing argument developed in these chapters, in fact, constitutes a fruitful avenue for future research. There are also additional themes deserving of attention. Although certainly not sufficient, perhaps this has been a necessary step toward a pragmatic capability approach

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Conclusion
Agency and Development

Development is a descriptive and a normative term. It not only denotes change but positive change. As such, ideas about development matter because they indicate what matters changing, in what way, and even how that change ought to take place. To a lesser or greater extent, approaches to development have been associated to human well-being. That is, ideas about development entail ideas about human beings.

Hence, ideas about development and ideas about human agency matter. Since much development policy entails assumptions about people, whether as ends or as means, should the latter not obtain, policies can become suspect. At best, in those situations, policies may well hit the target but miss the point, at worst, they can be detrimental to their very goals. This is not only due to the fact that the opportunity cost of public policy is other public policy, but because ill-informed policy itself can be harmful.

By far, the dominant approach in recent history has focused on one single indicator: opulence or command over resources. This has been mainly illustrated by the prevalence of gross national product (GNP) per capita, or growth, as a measure of a society's welfare. The relation with human well-being has been the assumption that higher income leads to higher consumption, and the latter increases utility (satisfaction or happiness). Despite some advantages in this approach, it has proven limited as increasing evidence has suggested that opulence can coexist with alarming levels of destitution, i.e. there can be growth without development.

Against this backdrop, Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (CA) has become the most influential alternative approach to development. It regards command over resources only as instrumentally valuable; that is, to the extent they contribute to the attainment of intrinsically valuable things. The latter are those things that make life worthwhile, and with which the CA is concerned. As such, the CA proposes a move from the means to the ends of development.

The CA places humans and their quality of life at the locus of attention. From this perspective people are what matters for development and redefines it as freedom,

emphasizing that it entails the enlargement of people's choices. In this sense, this approach entails the elaboration of an account of human beings and their agency.

To that end, the capability perspective emphasizes multidimensionality and human plurality. Concerning multidimensionality, the approach focuses on what people actually do and are as well as what they can do and be. In this sense, functionings and capabilities are proposed as categories capturing each, respectively. While the former refers to an individual's attained 'doings' and 'beings' that they value and have reason to value, denoting achievement, the latter encompasses all possible functionings from which an individual can choose, conveying freedom. Whether one or the other, the focus is on combinations of doings and beings. By so doing it expands the informational base, beyond a single dimension or indicator, to all the dimensions with intrinsic value.

Furthermore, the CA recognizes that individuals have multiple motivations. The notion of agency denotes the totality of a person's goals, encompassing self-regarding and other regarding ones, and the concept of well-being designates solely self-regarding ones. In this sense, both functionings and capabilities can be manifested in terms of agency or well-being.

Apropos of human plurality, the CA acknowledges that converting resources into functionings and capabilities is mediated, not automatic. Different people in different social and environmental contexts may require different amounts and types of resources to reach analogous levels of well-being. These mediating factors are personal or internal characteristics as well as contextual or external features, also referred to as conversion factors.

Additionally, in elaborating his argument about human beings, the CA develops the concept of agency further in terms of its older and grander notion, underscoring two components: i) acting and bringing about change, i.e freedom or choice; and, ii) judging those actions and changes as well as their underlying values and preferences, i.e. rationality or reasoning. Because of this, the CA encourages regarding people as in charge of their destinies, rather than simply as recipients of policy. As such, it favors public participation, even for the selection and valuation of relevant dimensions (for capabilities or functionings), and is inherently democratic.

The CA has proven to be quite influential for development in academic as well as policy circles. Scholarly, it has been able to engage many disciplines in fruitful dialogue. As part of this engagement, it has been subjected to rigorous examination. Most notably, concerning the CA's account of human beings, it has been suggested that despite its contributions, it regards people mainly as choosers, remaining unspecified in sociological terms.

The merits of this critique notwithstanding, it arguably focuses mostly on the first part of the older and grander notion adopted by the CA. Certainly, the approach appears to privilege it over the second. The primacy of freedom and choice is evidenced in regarding development as the 'enlargement of people's *choices'*. This puts attention on observables. The second part of agency's notion can be discerned from the attention to rationality. This is illustrated by the CA's emphasis in defining capabilities as all possible doings and beings that people value and have *reason* to value. In-principle unobservables are thereby admitted.

Moreover, there is the issue of what this definition replaces. Until 1992, Sen argued against the association of freedom with direct control on agency-related grounds. 'Freedom as control' was rejected because of its exclusive focus on people having the levers or power for the capabilities they enjoy. Thus, he proposed a distinction between 'realized agency success' and 'instrumental agency success'. While the latter was concerned with those outcomes brought about by the agents themselves and, as such, conveyed the idea of freedom as control, the former was broader and encompassed all outcomes, whether the agent was instrumental in achieving them or not. In this sense, this differentiation had the advantage of accounting for the agency of people who have others choosing and reasoning for them. However, since its abandonment, these people seem to be left unaccounted for.

This state of affairs has prompted questions regarding the actual scope of the CA's notion of agency and how to complement it, which are the concern of this dissertation. This implies two tasks. First, it seems warranted to scrutinize Sen's notion of agency, incorporating acting (choice) as well as judging (reasoning) as a whole, to delineate its breadth and depth. Second, recognizing the value in Sen's proposal, the task entails building on it so as to aid in the realization of its project. This means that, despite the attributes and benefits of important traditions in the debate regarding human action, some can be deemed more pertinent than others. In fact, some might be rather

inconsistent with the approach and, while addressing some relevant issues, may run the risk of casting shadow rather than shedding light on the approach.

Given that there are multiple theories of action available, it was necessary to take a step as far back as possible so as to identify the broadest alternatives. Since accounting for human beings is an ontological matter, the point of departure was the philosophy of science. Instead of conventional ontology, in seeking to start from the most fundamental position possible, philosophical ontology was deemed more pertinent.

Based on a heuristic that advances that perspective, leading to four ideal typical philosophies of science: neopositivism, reflexivity, critical realism, and analyticism, the agencies entailed by each of them were fleshed out. The result of this analysis indicates that neopositivism advances the conventional agent, following the axioms proposed by rational choice theory, who is unaffected by the structure, i.e. the virtually omnipotent *homo economicus*. Reflexity, being diametrically opposed to the latter, furthers the primacy of structure over agency, focusing on language as wholly determining the universe of possibilities for human beings, rendering them nearly impotent patients. Critical realism proposes an agent that engages with the structure in cycles, where each one exerts change on the other as in taking turns, signaling thusly an interaction between them, turning humans into interagents. Finally, analyticism considers humans and their context as one unit, constantly changing each other and mutually constituting one another, ruled by permanent and simultaneous exchange, perhaps best denoted by the term transaction, which makes humans transagents.

That argument was fully developed while exploring the themes pertaining this dissertation but ultimately carried out elsewhere. Since it moved well beyond the field of 'development', the area of interest of this dissertation, and the three essential chapters for the argument (and necessary for the compendium format) were already included, to maintain a streamlined argumentation, its addition was not deemed crucial for the line of reasoning presented.

To discriminate from these four options, the criteria were the two components of the CA's notion of agency (choice and reasoning), as they would have to be encompassed without neither being reduced to the other. The reasoning's relevance for the CA, suggests a move away from neopositivism. The significance of choice for the approach, in turn, indicates

distancing from reflexivity. Critical realism admits both, positing the generation of layered structure consisting of existing real, actual and empirical mechanisms. As such, this perspective requires assuming that in-principle unobservables exist. However, Sen's silence regarding the bases of the CA in terms of the philosophy of science, at the very least, suggests that he has made no explicit ontological commitments, which is exactly what critical realism demands. The last alternative is analyticism, which also allows encompassing choice and reason but without any ontological commitments regarding the existence of in-principle unobservables. Hence, the analyticist philosophy of science was found to be pertinent.

Because of its philosophical wagers, pragmatism was found to coincide with analyticism. Additionally, this framework seemed particularly advisable because of the influence that Hilary Putnam (arguably one of the main pragmatists in the 21st century) and Amartya Sen had on each other's work. There are, however, two main strands of pragmatism: classical and neopragmatism. The latter focuses on discourse, influenced by the linguistic turn and, therefore, leans towards a reflectivist philosophy of science. The former privileges experience, securing its place within analyticism. Hence, classical pragmatism was deemed as the adequate framework for this undertaking.

Pragmatism is a philosophy that focuses on action as its point of departure and ultimate goal. Wary of absolutes and certainty, it proposes a philosophy of continuity, progress and change. From this perspective, organisms and environment are emergent, constantly changing one another. Accordingly, human beings are not afforded any privileged position vis-à-vis nature. As any other organism, humans are regarded as part of a continuity with the world. Dewey advanced the concepts of 'organism' and 'environment', to underscore that neither has metaphysical primacy over the other and that both give meaning to one another. Moreover, organisms (humans) and environment (context) are deeply interwoven. They are constantly and simultaneously acting towards the other and being acted upon. That is, they are constitutive of each other. This relationship is regarded as 'transaction'.

For pragmatism, at the heart of human action is habit. This is a predisposition for action. Habits evidence the most internalized meanings humans have of the objects that make up their world, i.e. interpretations of which a person is likely not to be fully aware. In this sense, habits make the world intelligible. As such, they are more intimate and informative

than choice. The attention to habits indicates that, in the continuity of behavior, this philosophy encompasses all types of (trans)actions, from primitive reflexes, to habits, to reflective intelligence.

Additionally, objects also take central stage for pragmatism. They are everything and anything of which an individual is aware. They can be material or immaterial, real or fictional, etc. If a person notices it, it is an object for them. As such, they constitute a person's world. Objects point to the inclusion of in-principle unobservables alongside observables in the account of agency, without any ontological commitment to them.

Since pragmatism offers an account of human experience that comprises a wide array of behaviors, not only reflective ones, on which the CA seems to focus, and can also encompass both observables (such as choice) and unobservables (such as reasoning), which the CA's agency appears to require, it was deemed as a plausible framework for the task at hand.

Consequently, the question guiding this dissertation was stated thusly '*can classical pragmatism contribute to enrich the CA's concept of agency?*' This dissertation has answered positively. To elaborate the answer to that question, it has presented an argument structured into three parts, each consisting of two chapters.

Part I discusses the CA and its notion of agency. Thus, chapter 1 is devoted to present the approach on Sen's terms, against the dominant framework and emphasizing the issue of agency as described above. As such, it elaborates on the advantages of the CA as well as on its limitations. In that sense, it makes the case for the importance of contributing to enrich capabilitarian agency.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to that undertaking and finds that the CA's notion of agency is less robust than perhaps argued by some but also in need of complementarity. The capabilitarian agent also shows an important departure from the conventional rational agent, as described by rational choice theory. Sen's wider work exposes the importance of rationality and what he means by it. He directly rejects the dominant approach and redefines rationality as reasoning or the critical scrutiny of one's choices as well as one's preferences. Indeed, it includes the possibility of the analysis of reasons for reasons or second order preferences. As a result, contrary to conventional interpretations and

empirical applications of the approach, which argue that it pays exclusive attention to choice, for the CA the *gustibus est disputandum*. Furthermore, the significance of rationality so redefined for Sen is such that its relation to agency seems to be close to agency's relation to freedom. Therefore, rather than a rational agent, I have argued that the CA suggests a reasoning one.

The CA's reasoning agent can be regarded as a multi-motivated, multidimensional, plural, reflective chooser. I turned to the philosophy of science to elaborate on the implications of this insight for development research and practice. The CA moves beyond choice, although it does not abandon it, and towards the inclusion preferences. In this sense, the capabilitarian agent challenges positivist approaches concerned exclusively with observables (such as choice) in the pursuit of certainty. Instead, it requires the inclusion of interpretative traditions that allow the inclusion of meanings (such as [self] perceptions) alongside measurements.

Consequently, although the CA seems to outgrow the rational agent, it also suggests some room for maturation. In order to explore this possibility, pragmatism has been put forward in part II of this dissertation. Building on the conclusions of the previous chapter, the discussion departed from the philosophy of science in chapter 3. The exploration focused on classical pragmatism, based mainly on John Dewey's work. Because of the orientation towards practice in both the CA and pragmatism, I have presented the latter in terms of its implications for the increasingly influential evidence-based public policy and in contrast to the positivist convention. Pragmatism provides an account of how to think and act. In fact, action is its point of departure and ultimate end. Action is the default of state of organisms and environment and points to the continuity in nature. Human action is based on belief, which when internalized becomes habit. Habits are predispositions for action and entail ways of realizing desires via intelligent action and they make the world intelligible. The lack of belief, the interruption of action, is doubt. To rid themselves of it, humans engage in inquiry, an exchange with their environment, testing different hypotheses until one is found to advance action again. In this sense, inquiry seems to be rather fitting to describe the activity of development scholars and practitioners.

Transaction describes the relation between organism and environment. They are one indivisible unit, constantly changing one another and mutually constituting each other. As

such, inquiry in action and action is inquiry. While the former means that knowing is acting on the world from one's unescapable biases and, thus, these are as intrinsic as empirical evidence is to statements about 'reality'; the latter highlights that the known cannot be defined independently of the knower, and neither can the belief be defined independently of the context. Accordingly, pragmatism rejects absolutes and can be regarded as a philosophy of change. Therefore, I have argued that pragmatism reconsiders what evidence is and how it is treated. Contrary to the dominant tradition, for pragmatism, evidence does not speak for itself and is inevitably influenced by the biases (e.g. theories, interests and even imagination) of whoever is generating or consuming it. Accordingly, pragmatic evidence-based policy acknowledges that individual biases are as intrinsic as empirical evidence is to statements about reality and, further, that the former shapes the latter. This is because all action, including evidence production constitute the world. As a consequence, pragmatism entails a healthy awareness of the prejudiced positions of those generating and consuming evidence, which can lead to more effective policies.

The insights gained from this discussion led the way to tackle pragmatic agency in the chapter 4. Building on the philosophy of science, this has been carried out by dint of philosophical ontology. A heuristic, establishing two continua: the relationships between the knower and the known, and that between the observation and knowledge, has been employed. At the extremes of the latter lie four philosophical wagers, respectively: mind-world monism and dualism, and phenomenalism and transfactualism. Combining them generates what are arguably the most relevant philosophies of social science, regarded as ideal types, namely, positivism, reflexivity, critical realism and analyticism.

Because pragmatism seems to subscribe to mind-world monism and phenomenalism, I have argued that pragmatism adheres to analyticism. Its conformity to mind-world monism can be attested in its recognition that organism and environment constitute one indivisible unit constantly changing one another, i.e. transacting. Phenomenalism is evidenced in pragmatism's concern with objects, that is, anything and everything of which a person is aware, real or fictional, material or immaterial things, etc., which are regarded as constitutive to a person's being. As such, they certainly include choice but, most significantly, they focus on habits as well as values and preferences. Hence, pragmatism suggests a move from action to transaction, from agency to transgency and from agents to transagents, which means that humans are intelligent, reflective, diversely motivated organisms of habit that can be studied in terms of their objects.

Against this backdrop, the third part and its two chapters have sought to take the argument to what is its logical conclusion. The discussion carried out in previous chapters has hinted to the agreements and disagreements between the CA and pragmatism. Both have been addressed in these chapters and the argument in favor of a pragmatic capability approach fleshed out. Chapter 5 has engaged with the main theme of this dissertation: agency, and two concomitant ones related to it, namely ontology and empirical issues. Regarding agency, four issues have addressed: objects and habits, the constitution of people, values and preferences, and the relation between agent and context. The CA's reasoning agent already admits the inclusion of in-principle unobservables with its attention to preferences, and the incorporation of pragmatic objects and habits could be the next step in that direction. Moreover, the inclusion of habits particularly, can contribute to encompassing non-reflective behavior, in addition to the reflective one entailed by choice, the main focus of the CA. The inclusion of habits and objects could also enhance the elements constituting people, beyond achievements and personal characteristics. This can help to account for the agency of those groups who have others choosing and reasoning for them. By the same token, the CA could build on pragmatism to make better sense of the nature and function of values and preferences. Additionally, pragmatic transaction could enrich its account of the relation between people and their context.

As for ontology, albeit Sen has refrained from addressing ontological issues, the CA is found to propose a social ontology together with its rejection of ontological individualism. Additionally, the analysis has suggested that there seems to be traces of positivism within the CA as well as a demand to move beyond its notion of agency and its reasoning agent. The study of pragmatism has established that it advances a more elaborate social ontology. Not only does it reject ontological individualism but offers an account of collective or conjoint action. The examination confirms pragmatism's adherence to an analyticist philosophy of science, and furthermore suggests that the latter chimes with the CA's reasoning agent and, thus, could provide significant support for it.

With respect to empirical matters, the CA's flexibility when it comes to its application has been highlighted in terms of its appeal to the 'pragmatic nature of practical reason'. At its heart lies the possibility to adapt exercises according to data availability. In this sense, it has been argued that the approach's mention of pragmatism seems to refer to a lay

understanding or conventional conception rather than its actual philosophy. For pragmatism personal biases are as intrinsic to warranted assertions as evidence is. Therefore, no quantity or quality of data can make evidence speak for itself. On this basis, pragmatism acknowledges fallibility in inquiry and takes the provisional character of knowledge seriously.

Chapter 6 dealt with three additional central themes for both approaches, derived from the discussion regarding agency, namely freedom, democracy, and normativity. Regarding freedom, it has been argued that although both approaches acknowledge the importance of choice, they also complement it. As such, they stress the relevance of context and process. Likewise, they recognize the interdependence between freedom and rationality as well as between freedom and conversion factors. At the same time, they seem to differ on the treatment given to choice and the groups they can account for. The CA seems to equate choice to freedom (narrowly defined) and, given the latter's relation to rationality, restrict it to sufficiently healthy and abled adults. Pragmatism tackles the issued differently. Freedom is not choice but the power to transact according to it. As such, it is an attainment that allows people to change, to be and act differently. Thus, it seems to resonate with the CA, pointing towards a rewarding basis on which to build. Moreover, as in the case of agency, pragmatism's naturalistic philosophy and its concern with the continuity in behavior seems to cast the net wider so as to encompass agents who have others choosing and reasoning for them.

Apropos of democracy, both frameworks' commitment to democracy has been found to be related to their regard of people as agents, although they propose different types of agents. The CA acknowledges both that there is a myriad of life styles that a person might legitimately lead, and that they are dependent on personal as well as contextual features. Pragmatism, in turn, regards people as embedded in their contexts, constantly changing it, and being changed by it. People act to control the shape of that change, based on their experience. Even though democracy is defined differently by each framework, both converge in considering democracy a means as well as an end. It has been argued that one of the main divergences between the literatures lies in the scope of application. While the CA seems to place democracy at the level of society, the nation or the state, without (explicit) regard to is applicability for lower levels or smaller units, pragmatism proposes a broader notion of democracy applied explicitly to all forms of human association.

Finally, on the subject of normativity, as in previous themes, there is coincidence and difference. Although the two perspectives are consequentialist, they focus on different consequences. Whereas the CA holds freedom and achievement as the evaluative space, pragmatism advances solely action. Despite this difference, it has been argued that, to the extent that a focus on capability and functionings furthers action, a pragmatic capability approach could conceivably accommodate the view of development as freedom. A brief pragmatic reading of development research and practice suggests as much.

I have argued in favor of the capability approach as a framework that can take the debate about development further (whether among scholars or practitioners, if a clear-cut line differentiating them can be drawn). I have sought to do so with a qualification. Within the CA itself, there are issues that can hinder action as they have raised questions and critiques. In order to overcome some of them, pertaining to the CA's notion of agency, I have proposed pragmatism as a plausible alternative. In this sense, I have suggested that the manner in which that debate could advance is if the CA is enriched by classical pragmatism. In elaborating that argument, other relevant themes (e.g. ontology, freedom, democracy) have come to the fore as potential areas in which that combination can be fruitful. Importantly, a pragmatically enriched CA cannot constitute a definitive answer and it need not be so to further the debate. This proposal can only aspire to be a warrantedly assertible proposal that can settle the issue and further our efforts, for the time being. As such, making Dewey's words my own, this proposal is 'at the same time modest and bold'.

Consequently, these essays conclude this research project but most certainly not this research program. They are the culmination of a personal project but hopefully also the initiation of a collective one, as there is much that pragmatism and the CA can learn from each other. This dissertation seeks to be only the first step *towards a pragmatic capability approach*.