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Abstracts

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Mead and Sen on identity, agency, and economic behavior

Taking steps from Sen's definition of capabilities as the set of relational resources a person has, combined with its ability to benefit from it and use it functionally, intertwined with his idea that the moral significance of persons' capability is that of achieving the kind of lives they have reason to value, the paper wants to show the potentialities of a wider perspective about human economic behavior and decision-making processes intertwining Mead's and Sen's ideas on Self-identity and social context. Any preference expressed in an economic choice is the product of an act of evaluation, and such act has a moral significance. On this point, emerging developments of my proposal would strengthen, at once, the principled commitment to freedom of choice revealing in a "Mead-Sen" perspective the instrumental role of social behavioral patterns and socio-cultural environment (social group, community, nationality, race, sex, and now more and more social media) in the orientation of individuals' economic behaviors. On this regard, Sen has pointed out, similar to what Mead sustained, that the Self's identity is generated in a community and is strictly related to a rule-based conduct (Sen 1985b; Mead 1934). More precisely, discussing the nature of the behavioral foundation of economics, Sen tackled the problem of "identity", stressing that "community, nationality, class, race, sex, union membership, the fellowship of oligopolists, revolutionary solidarity, and so on, provide identities that can be, depending on the context, crucial to ourselves" (Sen 1985b, p. 348). A person's identity and concept of his own welfare can be influenced by the position of others in ways that may involve identifying with others. The experiences that persons live and their

closeness to other people occur in relation to what Mead would call the "generalized other", namely the «organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self» (Mead 1934 p. 154). The attitude of the "generalized other" is the attitude of the whole community, namely the common *ethos* which gives unity and consistency to the person's *identity* as well as the relational resources the person has combined with her ability.

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On "disabled participation"

So far, the capability approach applied to political theory (Bohman, 1996; Bohman & Rehg, 1997) has addressed the "political poverty" of deliberative processes only indirectly: as a result (of unequal social conditions), as a cause (of political exclusion) or as a motive (for civic empowerment and institutional reform). "Capability failure" (Bohman, 1997) in democratic discussion has rarely been examined, described and analyzed *in itself and for itself*, as an interactional dynamics and a collective experience producing its own range of emotions (confusion, embarrassment, annoyance, boredom – Berger, 2016) and its own "publics" (Berger, 2015). My point is that the pragmatist normative theory of deliberative democracy needs to be based on a more complete descriptive and explanatory theory of what usually goes wrong in actual public discussions, and that it could here benefit from detailed ethnographic and phenomenological accounts of what one call a *disabled participation*.

The past ten years, I conducted in Europe and in the US an ethnography of various borderline participatory processes, all characterized in their own way by systematic and profound infelicities in the lay participant's attempts to contribute. Starting from the observation of (1) sessions of "general public comments" in the Los Angeles City Council and (2) "citizen consultations" in a Brussels urban renewal program, I will depict disabled participation as a disheartening process of miscommunication between so-called ordinary citizens and institutional actors; a downward spiral where irrelevance and impropriety, on one side, impatience and inattention, on the other, come rapidly to feed each other. Since « capability failures » have an institutional and an ecological dimension, and cannot be inferred solely from individuals' deficits, the description of these cases will focus just as much on the social, material and semiotic surroundings of participation, and the sometimes disabling effects of these "environing forces" (Dewey, 1922).

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Democracy and public reasoning in the capability approach: Towards a sociological and pragmatist understanding of collective deliberation

Sen's capability approach insists on the tight connection between democracy and social justice. In *Development as Freedom* (1999), three benefits of democracy are emphasized: democracy as the exercise of public reason (not reduced to voting) has an intrinsic value insofar as the ability to participate into the public debate is valuable in itself; it has an instrumental value since it helps people defend their rights more efficiently; and, most importantly, it has a constructive value in that it allows people to be active participants in the overall social fabric, i.e. in the construction of social values, norms, public policies or the like, in the descriptions of social facts, in the identification of social problems or target groups requiring public action, etc. The constructive dimension of democracy is crucial in Sen's approach, it is the key to a capability-friendly connection between individual aspirations or viewpoints and collective decision-making processes.

Sen's fascination for democracy has raised sharp criticisms, e.g. existing social inequalities lead to participative inequalities that impede the achievement of Sen's ideal, only active deliberators are allowed to enjoy the full benefits of democracy, etc. In *The Idea of Justice* (2009), Sen strives to answer these criticisms; he develops a notion of democracy as public reasoning and insists on the necessity of a socially situated understanding of democracy. Our paper draws on these elements to elaborate the concept of "capability for voice", it uses empirical illustrations to show how this notion could be used for a sociological and pragmatist understanding of democracy and public reasoning.

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The theory of social selves and the capability approach: can the capability approach be more than a normative horizon for sociologists?

My contribution argues that Sen´s capability approach, especially his conceptualization of Human Agency can gain from sociological scholarship on Agency and reflexivity, particularly from theories of "social selves". Against the tendency to read the C.A. (only) as a normative framework for the evaluation of social arrangements, I argue that the capability approach can be read as an invitation to sociology to conceptualize Human Agency. My contribution argues that the whole idea of capabilities is based on a series of a-priori assumptions about human Agency which are central to the theoretical architecture of the C.A., but remain underspecified from a

sociological point of view. For the whole idea of capabilities to function, agents have to be able to act on their own value commitments, be able to choose between different options within their own opportunity set on behalf of what they "have reason to value". Theories of social selves show us that such assumptions may be too optimistic. While one finds elements in the work of Amartya Sen pointing to the fact that he is not ignorant to the role of social influences and subtle forms of power, he does not discuss the potentially far-ranging implications. On the basis of genuine qualitative empirical work on young persons in transition from school to work, I show that indeed, youngsters - confronted with specific structural and cultural contexts - pursue reflexively defined "projects" based on their concerns. Nevertheless, this "Reflexive" engagement with their potential futures is highly dependent on cultural patterns that frame the range of available options and vulnerable to experiences of disrespect. My results thus suggest that while providing useful elements for analyzing Agency, the capability approach has to be supplemented with a sound conception of the "person" that accounts for necessary preconditions for exercising "choice" in the strong sense. At the expense of doing so, the language of "Agency" and strategies aiming at "empowerment" are at risk of being practical techniques for the subjection of individuals.

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Jean DeMunck (CriDIS Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium)

Toward an evaluative sociology of human rights as capabilities

Human rights are at the center of a widespread ideology in our times of globalization of legal and political systems. The neoliberal version of constitutionalism proposes a restricted and individualistic understanding of the human rights discourse in order to justify and make possible the opening of markets and the shift of all the nations toward a liberal democracy. This *limited* version of human rights disregards the social, economic, and cultural rights; its *individualism* disregards the concepts of popular sovereignty and common good. In this context, Sen's understanding of human rights can function as a critical landmark of prevalent human rights discourses. Against the reduction of human rights to legal norms, he claims the ethical value of human rights and proposes to consider the "rights-as-goals" system as an evaluative heuristics of actions and situations. This paper is devoted to an exploration of this conception of human rights. It will consider its compatibility with pragmatism and its consequences for an evaluative sociology.

Three debates will be taken into account. The first one is the opposition between two versions of norm/values relationships (Putnam and Habermas). The paper argues for a Putnamian understanding of human rights. The human rights are not obligatory universal norms (versus particular ethical values linked not with justice, but with

different goods). They are potential universal values justified by deliberations in different contexts. They are evaluative concepts, able not only to constrain or regulate behavior (normative side), but also to describe and explain connections between actions and situations (cognitive side).

This leads to the second debate on the moral content of human rights. Sen argues for a distinction between legal, moral and political meaning of human rights. The moral content can be grasped in the moral concept of individual freedom in situations of interdependence. This is connected with discussions of perfect/imperfect obligations, or agent-relative/agent-neutral understanding of morality. The incompleteness of this moral content of human rights is closely connected with a political procedure of discussion, anchored in a public debate open to external observers (against communautarianism). As a third way between deontologism and consequentialism, this understanding of human rights-as-goals calls for a pragmatist concept of situation.

But what about legality? Legality is not the *ground* neither the only way of *realization* of human rights. Legality is a way (among others) to institutionalize the human rights. This leads to a connection with legal theories. Sen's conception of human rights is very close to Marmor's conception. Legality is seen as a partial and incomplete system of norms (Sunstein) which must be complemented via contextualized interpretation. Nevertheless, the human rights is not only expressed, but transformed by the legal discourse. As a third debate, we should consider here the Luhmannian argument on human rights as a symbol in and of the differentiation of society. What is the value of human rights between functional differentiation and moral justifications? Gunther Teubner's societal constitutionalism frames a discussion on this issue. This discussion paves the way to an evaluative sociology (of law, or of public policies). This sociology is not only positive because it describes and explains formation of meaningful interactive situations; it is an evaluative sociology because it overcomes the Luhmannian neutralism toward a post-positivist sociology: the kind of sociology we need in the globalized world.

Jack O. Griffiths (University of Exeter, Politics Department, UK)

Cultivating openness to action and experience: Dewey beyond Sen and Nussbaum on capability development

Sen's conception of capability development focuses on expansion of the range of possible 'functionings' an individual is able to choose in their lives. Sen resists calls to provide a substantive theory regarding *which* functionings are to be judged as the most choice-worthy *per se*. Nussbaum finds this thin conception too indeterminate, and advocates an account of the 'properly human' functionings as ground for the capability approach.

In this paper I shall argue that Dewey's philosophy provides resources for a conception of capability development that goes beyond both Sen's and Nussbaum's versions of the capability approach. Dewey gives an account of the betterment of human life as the cultivation of *openness to action and experience*. This furnishes a way to enrich the concept of capability itself, beyond the shallow notion of 'range of functionings one can choose' prominent in both Sen and Nussbaum, whilst also

maintaining Sen's resistance to being drawn into the general question of 'which functionings' are the most desirable.

Dewey's ethics focuses on powers of action as *general* characteristics, rather than as capacities for some particular functioning 'output'. He stresses the importance of practical intelligence, imaginative reflection, plasticity of habit, sensitivity to social and environmental interdependencies, and creativity in thought and action, among others, all of which are valued not simply for their efficacy in achieving particular concrete ends, but for their *expansive* character; not because they enable us to 'function properly', but because they are powers to explore, experiment, create, and so on.

'Capability development' conceived along these lines is characterized by an increasing openness to interaction with the world, by the cultivation of sensitivity, responsiveness, and flexibility with respect to possible action and experience.

Antti Gronow (Department Sociology, University of Helsinki, Finland)

Capabilities, action and social capital

According to the Capabilities Approach, the worth of societal development is to be evaluated against a backdrop of more substantial criteria that have to do with freedom of action. The Capability Approach indeed presents interesting ideas that are useful in assessing social development and social reforms. However, this approach also raises important and age-old questions having to do with action, societal change and the relation of the individual to social structures.

Amartya Sen wants to reserve an active role for the targets of reforms. While doing this, he resorts to arguments that emphasize the value-laden nature of action. Referring to values is insufficient if the underlying theory of action remains unchanged. Neither Sen nor Martha Nussbaum discusses the fundamentals of action theory, and this is what I propose to do with the help of the pragmatist theory of habitual action. Pragmatism also helps in understanding why it is possible to argue, as Sen does, that freedom is a social product: it is dependent on social attitudes. The worth of freedom, however, is not a relative issue because it is an intrinsic feature of our intersubjective constitution, as G. H. Mead argued.

However, pragmatism allows us to approach meta-sociological issues related to capabilities rather than substantial sociological questions. If we also want to address sociological questions about the effect of social relations – our affiliations in Nussbaum's terminology – on capabilities, then methods and ideas developed by social network analysts are at hand. They would point out that social positions often act as social capital: they make things possible for some, while constraining others in different positions. I discuss the two facets of social capital: trust-enhancing closure and brokerage, which brings value added in terms of individual (and organizational) performance in many contexts.

Ortrud Leßmann (Internationalen Forschungszentrum für soziale und ethische Fragen, Salzburg, Austria)

Adaptive preferences, identity and reflection: Social embedding in Sen's capability approach

This paper sets out to clarify the role reflection plays in removing and avoiding the hardening of adaptive preferences as considered by Amartya Sen. Sen's rather general reference to critical scrutiny and public debate has to be complemented by a more detailed description of reflection on the individual level such as Dewey's in order to mitigate some shortcomings of Sen's capability approach. By pointing to adaptive preferences and social conditioning in the context of evaluating well-being and poverty Amartya Sen alludes to the social embedding of the individual in his writings. He further alludes to it in the context of multiple identities by focusing on the special role of commitment in establishing one's affiliation to a group. In this paper I relate the processes of adapting one's preferences and identifying with a group thereby linking two bodies of literature that have rarely been linked so far. Sen frequently refers to critical scrutiny in the context of our multiple identities, but he does not explain how individual reflection, public debate and critical scrutiny are intertwined. Thus, I suggest looking at Dewey's definition and understanding of reflection in order to establish a link between the social and the individual level and to explore the reflection plays in removing and avoiding the hardening of adaptive preferences. Complementing Sen's rather general reference with Dewey's more detailed description of reflection mitigates some shortcomings of Sen's capability approach.

Torjus Midtgarden (University of Bergen, Centre for the Study of the Sciences and the Humanities, Norway)

Dewey's problem of the public: economic activities, vulnerable agents and capabilities

At the historical core of John Dewey's diagnosis of the problem of the public are the many vulnerable economical agents in the US who by the end of the 1920s lacked protections and securities of a modern federal welfare state. While Dewey in his early Hegel-inspired work conceives economic activities as communicative adjustments of producers' efforts to consumers' needs, he in the 1920s critically diagnoses the poorly regulated economic activities through their harmful bearings on workers' and consumers' health and developmental potentials. As a theoretical basis for this critical diagnosis, however, Dewey considers positive conditions for achieving one's developmental potentials in terms of available and stable resources in bio-physical environments and environments of technological and other cultural artifacts. I bring out the relevance of these considerations by elaborating on Bénédicte Zimmermann's comparison of Dewey's conception of agency and freedom and Amartya Sen's capability approach. Dewey's work may be seen to complement Sen's approach by stressing humans' vulnerable dependencies on bio-physical, social and technological environments.

Kenneth W. Stikkers (Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, USA)

Capabilities and growth, economic and human

This paper argues, first, that there are strong affinities between Amartya Sen's and Martha Nussbaum's use of the notion of "capabilities" in rethinking how economies are to be developed and measured, on the one hand, and John Dewey's notion of "growth" and its use by pragmatist economists, such as Thorstein Veblen, John Commons, and, more recently, Daniel Bromley, to rethink and to reconstruct their discipline, on the other. Second, the paper suggests that Dewey's notion of "growth" can do much to strengthen and to deepen Sen's and Nussbaum's "capabilities approach" to economics.

Like Aristotle, Sen, Nussbaum, and Dewey are concerned with the development and excellence of personal capabilities, or habits, rather than with the production and consumption of external goods—the focus of mainstream economics, grounded in utilitarianism: economic development and growth ought to serve human development and growth. Unlike Aristotle, though, for whom some fixed end, or *telos* guides and directs human growth and development, the ends of human growth and development, for Sen, Nussbaum, and Dewey, are historically and culturally contingent and continuously undergo modification. Furthermore, Sen, Nussbaum, and Dewey—contrary to Aristotle—all see democracy as the best political form for developing human capabilities and promoting human growth.

Dewey's focus, in his notion of "growth," upon the aesthetics of "experience," deepens Sen's and Nussbaum's capabilities approaches to economics by providing a broad framework for discussing and assessing persons' abilities to experience life with ever-increasing richness, intensity, and complexity. Additionally, Dewey deepens Sen's and Nussbaum's understandings of "democracy" by seeing it as more than just a political form but as a comprehensive "way of life."

Josiane Vero (Centre d'études et de recherches sur les qualifications, Marseille, France)

Beyond empowerment: How French corporate policies matter for workers' capabilities

Empowering individuals by acting on a whole configuration of parameters comprising resources and factors of conversion (be they individual, institutional, social, organizational, etc.) is of crucial importance in the capability approach (CA) developed by Amartya Sen. But far from being caught through this "empowerment side", the CA also emphasizes the possibility to voice one's preferences, wishes, expectations, and to make them count in the decision-making process. What matters in the CA is the combination of both dimensions.

In some ways, the CA reflects the interest of pragmatic sociology in situated understanding of action and call into question new ways of enquiry. Tackling worker's capabilities engages with the intercrossing of different levels of analysis (institutional-level, firm-level, individual pathways). From a quantitative methodology, Linked Employer-Employee Surveys may therefore be considered as a crucial empirical design.

Accordingly, the presentation will synthesize a combined study of individual and situational characteristics as a means for a better understanding of worker's capabilities within French firms through the second French linked employer-employee survey on

vocational training DIFES2, which allows for responses from 1800 employees and human resource management to be analyzed together. To this respect, we will firstly examine the conditions provided by firms and identifies capability-friendly backgrounds. Secondly, we will analyze the implications of the various corporate policy contexts for workers and whether they are liable to enable individuals to secure professional pathways.

Joëlle Zask (Université Aix-Marseille et Centre d'études des mouvements sociaux-EHESS/CNRS, France)

Agriculture as interaction between the farmer's capabilities and the production of his own environment

Following Sen and Nussbaum, one defines capabilities as the existing resources and opportunities a society *offers* to its members so that they may freely use them. Through the experience of gardening and cultivating a plot of land, (of which I analyzed the "democratic" range in a book to be published in March), I will show that individuals' freedoms of use depend certainly on what their society offers, but also on their own activities and the nature of their consequences: in cultivating and growing edibles, the human being, as « Adam » did in Eden, creates a place where to live, while creating himself. He acts so as to forge both the conditions of its own existence and the *environment* without which he would perish. To benefit from a set of capabilities leads to generate some new ones. And being empowered to do so is a proof of their effectiveness.

Interactions between these two aspects correspond to two key notions in Dewey's pragmatist philosophy: *experiment*, which can be only personal, (being inseparable from the singular commitment of a subject moving along with an object), and *environment* (which is not a substance, but, in Dewey's word, a phase of the ongoing interactions of the living being with its medium). On the basis provided by examples of recent urban community gardens and « healing » gardens, I will construe gardening as the exemplification of a situation in which experiment as a means for self-realization is also a means for the production of a sustainable environment. In doing so, I will support the idea that capability theory is all the more able to amend existing theories of justice that it is related to free individual initiative and to the control exercised by stakeholders themselves over the favorable conditions of the continuum of the activities they undertook.

Bénédicte Zimmermann (EHESS, Paris & Permanent fellow Wissenschaftskolleg, Berlin)

Capabilities and valuation: A pragmatist account

Understanding capability as the range of possibilities people have to achieve doings and reach states of being they value, as the capability approach (CA) does, makes a topical issue of values. Focusing on what is of value for people rather than on values that are given once and for all and among which individuals may choose, makes the activity of "assigning value to" or "valuing" an important aspect of the diversity prospect that

underlies the CA. Although widely addressed in theoretical and epistemological discussions, this point paradoxically remains empirically under-investigated. From the theoretical literature, we learn that inquiring into valuing without falling into the traps of value essentialism, on the one hand, or subjectivism on the other, requires analyzing a whole range of interacting factors, extending from individuals' features to environmental ones. But what does valuing mean concretely? It is not just a matter of expressing satisfaction or preferences. Beyond outcomes, complex valuation processes are involved. What are they actually? How can they be empirically addressed and grasped? And is everyone able to articulate and formulate what is of value to her? Rather than taking valuation for granted or leaving it to philosophical debates, empirical social sciences may gain by translating it into more specific research sub-questions, if they want to bring more than a descriptive contribution to the study of diversity.

John Dewey's pragmatist account of valuation can fruitfully complement the CA in view of opening the black box of valuation. His approach is all the more suited in that, as early as 1891, he pointed to the subtle nuance between capability and capacity, making freedom, capability/capacity, and development three pillars of his work.

In a first part, we will present the notions of capability and development according to Dewey and discuss their affinities to and differences with the CA. In a second part, we will address Dewey's valuation approach, focusing on three main dimensions: valuation as judgment of practice; valuation as a matter of inquiry; and valuation as deliberation. In a last step, we will elaborate on the consequences that may follow from this for empirical inquiries on valuation, using capabilities in the field of work as a case in point. Finally we will address some critical issues left open by such a framework.

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