

# Objective and Subjective Aspects of Well-being: Capabilities and Values

---

**Biturajac, Mia**

**Master's thesis / Diplomski rad**

**2018**

*Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj:* **University of Rijeka, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište u Rijeci, Filozofski fakultet u Rijeci**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:186:872408>

*Rights / Prava:* [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2024-11-08**



*Repository / Repozitorij:*

[Repository of the University of Rijeka, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences - FHSSRI Repository](#)



**SVEUČILIŠTE U RIJECI**

**FILOZOFSKI FAKULTET**

**Mia Biturajac**

**Objective and Subjective Aspects of Well-being:  
Capabilities and Values**

**Diplomski rad**

**Rijeka, rujan 2018.**

## Table of contents:

Introduction.....	4
1. The concept of Well-being: What is Well-being? .....	6
2. Classifications of the Theories of Well-being .....	9
3. The Capability Approach .....	13
3.1. Different kinds of capabilities .....	15
3.2. The central human capabilities .....	16
3.3. Fertile functionings vs. corrosive disadvantages .....	19
3.4. The merits of the capability approach .....	19
4. The Value fulfillment Theory of Well-being .....	23
4.1. Why values? .....	24
4.2. The value fulfillment theory .....	27
4.3. What do we value? .....	29
4.4. How theories of well-being can help us help .....	31
5. Capabilities and Values .....	35
6. Directions for action .....	37
Conclusion .....	39
References .....	40

## Summary:

Well-being is a philosophical discussion that deals with the question of what it means to live a good life and this thesis deals with a part of contemporary discussion on well-being. There are two opposing branches of theories – the subjective one that deals with what it means to live a good life from the subject's point of view or from the inside, while the objective theories deal with what it means to live a good life according to some objective criteria that are from the outside of the individual. My attempt in this work is to reconcile the two opposing sides by opting for one objective theory and one subjective while arguing that these theories can be complementary, even though they belong to opposite camps. First, I delineate the concept of well-being from other similar concepts in order to clarify what I will be talking about, after which I offer different classifications of theories of well-being and their particular features. Then, I opt for one objective theory, endorsed by Martha Nussbaum, called the capability approach while also offering my own views on it together with its strengths and weaknesses. After that, I outline a theory proposed by Valerie Tiberius called the value fulfillment theory, which is a subjective theory while also taking into account her efforts of making her theory of well-being applicable to everyday situations. Ultimately, I compare the two theories outlining the aspects in which they differ and emphasizing the things they have in common, ending with directions for action and conclusion.

## **Introduction:**

The question of what it means to live a good life is a question that might be as old as philosophy and it might date back even further. It is also a question that is not exclusive to philosophy, but it tends to come up in lives of people who have little to no contact with philosophy. Granted, the formulation may be different, they might be grappling with somewhat different concepts and their own theories might be different than those we find in the philosophical discussion, but the broad idea of it is probably addressed at different points in people's lives. If you listen closely, you can hear people's own conceptions of what it means to live a good life, at least according to their own perspective, even if they are skeptical to it applying to everyone. You can strike up a conversation about it and they will often tell you at least one thing they consider valuable or necessary in their own lives. I've rarely come up against someone who was willing to talk about it and had nothing at all to say about it.

The answers they provide might be in line with how they were brought up or resembles a tradition they were raised in. Sometimes they could not be regarded as particularly innovative, insightful or wise, but rash and narrow-minded. However that is far from the norm as I've also stumbled upon really insightful and inspiring answers which made me rethink my own positions.

Now, I'm not a professional interviewer, or an empirical scientist and all of this constitutes as anecdotal evidence at best. It is simply my impression that this topic is if not in the forefront, at least in the background of people's lives. It is often brought into limelight when people are faced with difficult life situations or major decisions. Some look for answers outside themselves and some look for answers within, but they evaluate and contemplate their lives upon deciding on their next course of action.

Even if we look away from regular people, or people in general, we can find this question addressed at every corner. It is central to numerous works of art, whether it be painting, music or literature. If you're a religious person, you probably subscribe to a certain conception of a good life that is offered by it, and if you're not, you might look for answers elsewhere, from popular culture – movies, TV, books, to sciences like psychology, sociology, anthropology etc. If you're looking for answers you will almost certainly stumble upon philosophy which drives me back to the beginning of this thesis.

Philosophy undoubtedly has something to say about it, since it is a topic that is discussed for thousands of years. No wonder that it is beyond the scope of this essay, or any for that matter to reveal what's philosophers' stand on this topic. One of the things that philosophy can offer us is a way of understanding the concept of well-being, together with numerous theories that capture different notions of that concept. In this thesis I will focus on the contemporary discussion on well-being, opting for two theories that traditionally belong to the opposite sides of the spectrum between objectivity and subjectivity. First, I will give attention to the concept of well-being itself in order to specify what I will be talking about, and then I will present different ways of classifying the theories of well-being. The lion's share of my thesis are going to be two theories that I will endorse. One of them is the capability approach as is represented by Martha Nussbaum and the other is the value fulfillment theory, as is presented by Valerie Tiberius. Lastly, I will try to find some common ground between the theories and explore how they are connected, concluding in direction for further research and action in the domain of well-being.

## 1. The Concept of Well-being: What is Well-being?

Well-being is a concept used in many disciplines. While it is roughly referring to similar things there are some nuances which would have to be addressed. The Oxford Dictionary defines well-being as: „The state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy.“ (2018) While this definition might be helpful in common everyday use it is rather imprecise in terms of the philosophical inquiry. Admittedly, well-being *is* a concept used in medicine and it is connected to health. There are collocations like patient's well-being with which doctors of medicine are concerned and which is assessed when deciding upon particular medical procedure.

However, it is also used in law and social work for example in the case of child well-being and its relation to their home environment. We can talk of students' well-being in particular university programs, well-being of people with disabilities, seniors, war veterans etc. Well-being of animals with regards to environmental problems and human intervention in the environment. All of these cases capture the intuition that is also present in the philosophical investigation of the term, namely, what it means and when something is *good* for someone. While all of these instances capture a narrower scope of well-being pertaining to a particular context they can be constitutive of someone's general well-being, which is in turn what philosophers are concerned with. (Crisp, 2017)

All in all, philosophical account of well-being is concerned with the broad picture of well-being:

„how well a person's life is going for that person.“ or

„what is non-instrumentally or ultimately good for a person.“ (Crisp, 2017)

To illustrate this notion further, a common method in philosophical literature, as Campbell (2016) writes in his paper *The concept of well-being* is to enumerate synonymous words and phrases:

Well-being is often discussed under the heading of *welfare, self-interest, one's interests, one's advantage, one's good, prudential value, quality of life, flourishing, or the good life*. (...)Your well-being is a matter of *how well you are doing, how well things are going for you, or how well your life is going for you*. It is what you attend to when asking yourself “What's in it for me? (para. 4)

Mind you, there are some usual contenders that might sneak their way under the term well-being, which are sometimes associated with it, but for the sake of clarity should be differentiated. For example, happiness is a term closely related to well-being but it could not be equated with it. While happiness, defined in terms of an affective state of joy in a particular time period, might be argued to be constitutive of well-being, it is not that particular meaning which is usually related with well-being but the happiness of life in general. This nuance can be explained by two examples:

1. You are sitting at the café with a friend, we'll call him Marko. At one point Marko gets a call that he is under consideration for a prestigious academic award and after finishing the phone call he laughs and jumps around exclaiming: I'm so happy!.

2. You are sitting at the pub with another friend. Let's call him Ivan. You have not seen him for a long time so you are catching up. You ask him: Are you happy? He answers: Yes, my job is great, I am being considered for a promotion. My brother got married last week and they bought a house. I recently got a dog from a shelter, she's really great. Things are looking up.

From these examples one could see that the first one is about the current emotional state of a person while the second example is pertaining to their overall life assessment. The latter captures the meaning of happiness that is synonymous to well-being, one that evokes the notions of stability and permanence that living a good life is usually thought to entail.

Further, happiness is a term associated with human well-being and while a great part of the discussion is in fact about human well-being, it is advisable to leave room for other living beings and talk of their well-being like animal or plant life. (Crisp, 2017)

Another term that is used almost synonymously with well-being is welfare. However, in literature there are slight differences that need to be accounted for. Welfare is defined as:

a concept that has frequently taken the place of utility in political thought, with the idea that aim of social betterment should be to maximize the welfare of the population. Problems of comparison, measurement, and aggregation dog the notion, and different conceptions of what amounts to genuine welfare abound. (Blackburn, 2005, p. 504)



As is indicated above, the term welfare often has political and economic implications, and while some authors (Woodard 2003) use it to refer to well-being and are basically equating it with well-being, it is not always the case.

Moreover, well-being is considered as a kind of value, for it is commonly referred to as prudential value which the term *good for* points to. (Crisp, 2017) There are other kinds of values that might partake in prudential value but can be teased apart, for example, moral value or aesthetic value. (Crisp, 2017) Spending a large amount of money to redecorate your living room while your job is hanging by the thread might be aesthetically valuable but it just might not be prudentially valuable, or running into a burning building to save someone as morally laudable as it could be, seriously threatens your well-being. Some would disagree with these claims and link the acts of heroism to well-being, or inextricably link living a good life with a morally good life which was common in Ancient Greek philosophy. I will not go further into that at this point. The important thing is to recognize that these kinds of values do not entirely overlap, if at all.

There is one more point I would like to touch upon. Well-being is often considered both as a descriptive and a normative concept. The project is set out to describe the phenomena of well-being, what falls under the category – what is good for the individual, what benefits them. The other side of the coin is normative as Rodogno (2015) writes:

‘well-being’ also has normative significance, i.e., it involves reasons: if A is better for you than B, *ceteris paribus*, you have more reason to do A. While very few disagree with this claim, growing disagreement is to be encountered with respect to the kind of normativity well-being is taken to involve. (p. 3)

When weighing out some choices or options in life, an important thing, if not the most important thing that tips the scale is when we figure out what is good or bad for us (if other people are not negatively impacted by it). It seems reasonable to me to expect that results of this discussion should have an impact on people's actions or at least decision-making processes. It seems absurd to think that we would put in such effort to figure out what it means to live a good life just for the intellectual challenge of it and not for its practical application to our own lives. I am of the opinion that therein lays the significant contribution of philosophy, both in specifying the concept, possibly refining it, and exploring its connection to and implications for usage in the everyday experience.

## 2. Classifications of the Theories of Well-being

In classifying the theories and approaches philosophers take to explore well-being, they commonly use the dichotomy between objective and subjective well-being. This is different than the usual philosophical distinction between objective and subjective in which objective is something that holds and exist regardless of the observer, experiencer, etc.– the subject. It is sometimes closely related to realism in numerous philosophical discussions. Conversely, subjective is usually associated with positions in which something holds, exists, can be observed dependent on the subject. In philosophical discussions it is usually placed alongside anti-realism, subjectivism or even relativism.

The dichotomy in the discussion on well-being is reminiscent of the aforementioned but it could not be characterized precisely as such. Roughly speaking, the objective well-being usually refers to how well someone's life is going from the *outside*, while subjective well-being is concerned with how one's life is going from the inside, i.e. how good it *feels* or *seems* from the subject's point of view. In other words:

Broadly, subjective accounts are those which make well-being and prudential value depend in some way upon certain subjective mental states of the individual concerned, such as pleasure or desire; while objective accounts hold that well-being and subjective value are determined at least partly independently of such states. (Taylor, 2011, p. 19)

According to such classification, theories that traditionally fall under the domain of subjective well-being are hedonism and desire-fulfillment theory. According to these theories, what counts as good for individual stems from their subjective attitudes or states, while objective theories, namely perfectionism and objective lists, usually provide answers to what is good independent of the individual's attitude towards it.

In that sense, the distinction might be more akin to externalism and internalism in the philosophical tradition, which can be found in ethics, philosophy of mind, language and others, which actually some philosophers in the domain of well-being prefer and endorse like Connie Rosati (1996).

There are also other concepts which Rodogno (2015) talks of which would be useful to mention, namely mentalism or experientialism: „A theory is mentalist or experientialist if it

states that something can affect an individual's well-being only to the extent to which the individual experiences that thing." (p.4). This significantly concerns subjective theories, especially the desire fulfillment theories as it inspired the shift from the traditional one to the informed desire-fulfillment theory in order to avoid cases in which person's desires are being fulfilled left and right without them being aware of it. Admittedly, that could also be problematic for other theories of well-being and people intuitions can differ with respect to that even regardless of the theory they are endorsing.

Concerning the theories themselves they can be formal (explanatory) and substantive (enumerative). (Rodogno, 2015) Substantive theories are trying to pinpoint the things or items which make life good. Contrarily, formal theories have a task of providing an explanation as to why those things are good for an individual.

Commonly, many traditional theories are both substantive and formal since they are identifying what is that thing that is good and providing an explanation for why that is. Hedonism claims that pleasurable experiences or the positive ratio of pleasure over pain is good because pleasure is the ultimate good. The first part refers to the substantive part of hedonism while the second (one after 'because') refers to formal hedonism. To illustrate this distinction, we can mention the example of what separates desire-fulfillment from hedonism. Hedonists could argue that desire-fulfillment is good for an individual which is a claim of the substantive kind; however, they would argue that they are good *because* they lead to pleasure which is the ultimate good, while desire-fulfillment theorists would argue that fulfilling desires is the ultimate good. They can agree on the substantive part of the theory but they are in contrast with regards to the formal part.

Theories of well-being have yet another characteristic that can be delineated which is that they are subject-relative: "Theories of well-being need to explain why a putative contributor to well-being is good for the individual whose well-being it is." (Sumner, 1996, p. 20 as cited in Hall and Tiberius, 2015, p. 175)

The term subject-relativity might fool you into thinking that Sumner advocates relativity or subjectivity in traditional philosophical sense. Rather, he argues, as can be seen from above, that theories of well-being take into account the fact that goodness is observed in relation to subjects, emphasizing that they need to accommodate and explain why it is good for them. He introduces that concept as a property of well-being discussion, just to highlight what substantive theories should aim to answer.

Yet, some authors take subject-relativity to get across another point, which is that well-being should be investigated in terms of each individual. Specifically, Connie Rosati advocates the „rational fit theory of well-being“ in which „the contributors to a person’s well-being must be suited to her individual nature.“ (Hall & Tiberius, 2015, p. 175)

I will not go further into different views on subject-relativity, I am content with delineating it as a useful property and with it in mind I will turn to the distinction between subject-dependent and subject-transcending theories, introduced by Hall and Tiberius (2015), which is a classification of theories that pay special attention to the subject-relativity property. The dichotomy is at first glance similar to the one between objective and subjective, externalist and internalist, as subject-dependent theories are those that take into account subject's „particular features“ while subject-transcending theories „reject subject dependence, (...) such theories ground well-being in factors that transcend the particular individual, such as species-level traits or objectively valuable goods.“ (Hall & Tiberius, 2015, p. 176) Nonetheless, the distinction is different with regards to subjective and objective one because, as Hall and Tiberius claim, non-attitudinal subject-dependent theories can be classified as objective since they are pay no mind to individual differences between subjects but they are subject-dependent in a way that they take into account subject-sensitive features other than attitudes.(2015) For example, if someone were to put happiness on an objective list, their claim would be that someone's life is going well for them if they are happy whether they have any pro-attitudes towards happiness or not, though it would be strange if they didn't.

Dichotomies or branches of theories often present us with trade-offs and people opt for one set of theories over the other depending on what they are willing to sacrifice. In the distinction that I use, between the subjective and objective theories, lies a compromise between pro-attitudes, inner states of the agent and intuitions of things that are objectively good but can be motivationally impotent for the agent. Specifically, subjective theories pay attention to subjects inner worlds, i.e. their experiences, desires, pleasure, emotions etc. They are respondent to the intuitions that living a good life should be reflected in people’s attitudes towards their lives. After all, they are the ones living those lives, and their actual satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their lives should definitely count for something as well as their assessment of how their lives are going from their perspective.

At first glance, this seems almost unquestionable until you take into consideration people’s actual inner lives and what they can amount to. People are not the best kings of their castles as

there are numerous examples of people being wrong about what they feel or want – wanting things that would be bad for them, thinking they want things that they do not actually want. They can want things that are harmful for them and others either knowingly or unknowingly. Living just for the sake of pleasure might lead to devious, mischievous or even harmful behavior, which is somehow not what we usually consider as a pinnacle of a good life, for example gluttonous behaviors like drug or alcohol abuse, overindulgence in unhealthy foods etc. Conversely, there are things that feel bad and are not pleasurable but can be argued to be good for them, like going to the dentist, taking medicine, racing in a triathlon, working hard on a mathematical problem etc. Ultimately, people’s inner states can often be misguided, illusory, and irrational so it does not seem particularly reasonable to proclaim them as the sole authority of assessing how our lives are going, especially since they can often miss the target of what our well-being can consist in. After all, there are whole schools of thought, like stoicism, that are dedicated to providing ways of conquering the brittle human spirit.

Chime in objective theories that respond to the intuitions that there are things that are good for people, outside of what they think is good for them or how they feel about them. The objective theories capture the set of notions that you can’t always get what you want, that life is sometimes hard and it does not feel good, but that those things can and do make our lives good for us, even though we don’t particularly like them or initially want them.

Here also lies their curse, as they traditionally neglect people’s pro-attitudes with regards to their lives. They are at risk of alienation, i.e. of making people unaffected by the things that are good in their lives, of making people’s lives good from the outside and not from the inside. And why would we be concerned about ensuring good lives for people when they would not themselves endorse such a life? Having a philosophical discussion about that would be like arguing which hue of color to choose in painting a color-blind person’s room.

As can be seen, both groups of theories have their strengths and weaknesses. They capture different intuitions that seem commonsensical but also seem to be mutually incompatible. That is why I think the right way to go about it is to try to find middle ground between these two groups of theories and find a way for them to complement each other. This is precisely what I am attempting here – to reconcile Nussbaum’s capability approach and Tiberius’s value fulfillment theory, which are belonging to the opposing camps of well-being.

### 3. The Capability Approach

The Capability Approach is a project that has gained the most ground in the domain of political and moral philosophy together with economics. Nonetheless, it can be construed as a type of objective theory – one that has elements both of perfectionism and of an objective list. I will return to that shortly, but first, let us see what are some central ideas of the capability approach.

The capability approach is not solely a philosophical project nor is it exclusive to the discussion of well-being. Its origin can be traced to Amartya Sen, an economist and a philosopher who has set the whole capability approach in motion paving the way for others, most notably Martha Nussbaum, to develop it further. It also belongs to the multidisciplinary arena as it encourages collaboration between philosophy, sociology, economics, law and policy making, etc.

What might be noticeable is that I am, following the example of most authors dealing with capabilities, using the term approach rather than the term 'theory'. The reason behind it is that: „The capability approach is generally conceived as a flexible and multi-purpose framework, rather than a precise theory of well-being“ (Robeyns, 2016)

Thus, different authors who deal with well-being have somewhat different views concerning the approach. In this work, I will mostly focus on Nussbaum's account of the capability approach. According to her, the capability approach aims to: „provide the philosophical underpinning for an account of basic constitutional principles that should be respected and implemented by the governments of all nations, as a bare minimum of what respect for human dignity requires. „ (Nussbaum, 2001, p.5)

Nussbaum's version of the capability approach, has two things on its agenda – one is comparative assessment of the quality of life and the other is development of the theory of basic or minimal social justice. (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 46) This means that, on the one hand, the goal of the capability approach is to provide reliable tools and indicators for assessing the quality of life among citizens various countries. On the other hand, the goal is to develop a theoretical and philosophical framework which serves as a partial theory of justice which governments all over the world should and could implement. By partial theory she means that the capability approach arranges the affairs at the level of basic social minimum up to the threshold of the capabilities.

This is what makes the project interdisciplinary because it is about developing measuring tools for quality of life based on the capabilities which more appropriately befalls economists, sociologists and political scientists etc., while the development of basic social justice is what is most philosophically potent and also a part of the discussion central to Martha Nussbaum's project.

In the heart of the capability approach is the effort to examine and promote what people are effectively able to do and to be, that is, what they are *capable* of doing and being. Unlike other theories of well-being who set subjective factors like desire-fulfillment, pleasure or objective like GDP, employment rates, income as indicative of well-being, the capabilities approach takes capabilities as the 'official currency' of well-being. As Robeyns explains further:

Well-being and development should be discussed in terms of people's capabilities to function, that is, on their effective opportunities to undertake the actions and activities that they want to engage in, and be whom they want to be. These beings and doings, which Sen calls achieved functionings, together constitute what makes a life valuable.(p. 6)

This paragraph also hints at another important characteristic of the capability approach, which is the distinction between capabilities and functionings. We find a similar phrasing of the capability approach in Stanford Encyclopedia: „Functionings are ‘beings and doings’, that is, various states of human beings and activities that a person can undertake. (...)Capabilities are a person's real freedoms or opportunities to achieve functionings.“ (Robeyns, 2016)“ Capabilities can be seen as a pool of potential functionings, while functionings are realized capabilities.

In order to *be* healthy, you have to be able to go to the doctor, eat and drink food that is not endangering your health, have acceptable living conditions and so on. In this example, being healthy is a functioning while having the opportunity or ability to take care of your health is a capability. Robeyns (2003) illustrates this idea with a similar example, the capability approach:

(...) asks whether people are well-nourished, and whether the conditions for this capability, such as sufficient food supplies and food entitlements, are met. It asks whether people have access to a high quality education, to real political participation, to community activities

which support them to cope with struggles in daily life and which foster real friendships, to religions that console them and which can give them peace of mind. (p. 7)

### **3.1. Different kinds of capabilities**

Now that we have an idea of what capabilities are, we can delineate between different kinds of capabilities. Nussbaum (2010) differentiates between *basic*, *internal* and *combined* capabilities. Basic capabilities are: „the innate faculties of the person that make later development and training possible.“ (Nussbaum, 2010, “The central capabilities”, para. 12) They are the capabilities we are given naturally by our birth, biology, genetic make-up, God – whatever you want to attribute them to. They are prerequisites for further development, i.e. development of internal capabilities which include: „personality traits, intellectual and emotional capacities, states of bodily fitness and health, internalized learning, skills of perception and movement“ (Nussbaum, 2001, “The central capabilities”, para. 8) among other things and they are „ trained or developed traits and abilities, developed, in most cases, in interaction with the social, economic, familial, and political environment.“ (Nussbaum, 2010, “The central capabilities”, para. 8) They differ from basic capabilities in that they are not given by nature but are developed.

Further, combined capabilities build on internal capabilities as they are „internal capabilities plus the social/political/economic conditions in which functioning can actually be chosen“. (Nussbaum, 2010, “The central capabilities”, para. 10)

To illustrate this, imagine a great philosopher who is living in a country which closed off all of their philosophy departments due to lack of funding. The person has biological and cognitive predispositions for being a philosopher, meaning that they obtain basic capabilities, they are skilled in reading, writing, critical thinking and logic which are acquired skills – internal capabilities. Unfortunately, they are not able to become a professional philosopher , meaning that they do not have combined capabilities of becoming one, as the socioeconomic situation does not provide opportunities for it.

The term 'basic capabilities' can have another meaning in the capability discussion, different from the aforementioned Nussbaum's account of it. Its meaning can be evocative of the term 'minimal', encompassing those capabilities that ensure basic human needs and minimal.



Now that I have outlined some of the main ideas of the capability approach, let us take a look at the list of capabilities constructed by Martha Nussbaum.

### **3.2. The central human capabilities**

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

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

Nussbaum gives special significance to two of these ten capabilities that are outlined above, namely, affiliation and practical reason. She argues that these two capabilities are integrated into and operate above all the others, granted that the others are brought to the minimal threshold. Her rationale is that practical reason has to be employed to govern the various functionings capabilities can take and is responsible for choices in life while affiliation promotes person's integration and place in society.

As I have mentioned earlier Nussbaum helps herself with capabilities to construct a partial theory of justice and justice is served only and as long as the capabilities are brought to a certain threshold: „respect for human dignity requires that citizens be placed above an ample (specified) threshold of capability, in all ten of those areas.“ (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 79 )

As is evident, Nussbaum is not a fan of concessions between capabilities as they are 'irreducibly heterogeneous' which means that an abundance of one capability does not remedy the lack of another. (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 79) All of them have to be satisfied up to a certain threshold essential for securing and maintaining human dignity. However, sometimes situations are such that not all capabilities can be procured. These situations are tragic, as Nussbaum refers to them, since they involve some kinds of compromises or conflicts of capabilities. For example, if you imagine a lower-middle class single mother of four, you will certainly come against prime examples of capabilities trade-offs like sacrificing play and bodily health, sadly enough, often in order to ensure the same capabilities to her children. Admittedly, the capabilities approach is not a perfect system, but it should not be discarded for it, instead it should be changed with new discoveries of optimizing people's lives.

Furthermore, the capabilities outlined above are not set in stone, there is a possibility of expanding the list as new realizations present themselves and they are also susceptible to being customized by the particular nations that are implementing them. This brings me to another important point, on which Nussbaum also elaborates, that the capabilities are specified and enforced „by each nation's system of constitutional law, or its basic principles if it lacks a written constitution.“ (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 88) Basically, she provides a floor plan on which each nation can build further.

All of these capabilities are there to ensure human dignity to every citizen. Unlike some other theories, namely, those who take family as a unit of social justice, the capability approach takes pride in its *each person's capability principle* which states that:“ the capabilities sought are sought for each and every person, not, in the first instance, for groups or families or states or other corporate bodies.” (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 74) Thus, the capability approach despite its objective status pays close mind to the individual and fulfillment of their potential – after all, it is concerned with what individuals are able to do and be, and a part of that surely takes into account how the person perceives themselves and their lives to go, together with their aspirations for future improvement. This opens the door for the compatibility of this theory with a kind of subjective theory of well-being.

### **3.3. Fertile functionings vs. corrosive disadvantages**

Nussbaum uses additional concepts in her theory of well-being, ones that originated from Wolff and De-Shalit (2007), namely, fertile functionings and corrosive disadvantage, where the former refers to a capability „that tends to promote other related capabilities.“ while the latter refers to the „deprivation that has particularly large effects in other areas of life.“ (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 97) In other words, fertile functionings are those which support and perpetuate other desirable ones. An example of that is health which is a prerequisite for realization of many other capabilities like education, affiliation, play, control over one's environment etc. A counterpart of fertile functioning is a corrosive disadvantage that cuts off some of the capabilities that are beneficial for the individual. An example of that can be drug addiction as it *corrodes* family ties and relationships with people, control over one's environment, opportunity of gainful employment, bodily integrity and all kinds of things often associated with it. Similarly then, according to Nussbaum, practical reason and affiliation make all the other capabilities realizable.

This shows a complex relationship between capabilities and their mutual interdependence. This makes the capability 'business' a high risk-high reward project since if one crucial capability is left out, all the others might come crumbling down but it also means that if we provide and ensure one or few important capabilities it might boost all the others up.

### **3.4. The merits of the capability approach**

As I have mentioned earlier, the capability approach can be loosely construed as an objective list and as with every theory, there is a set of problems they are faced with. One of the problems of objective lists is arbitrariness or the fact that it faces a challenge of offering explanations for each of the items on the list together with explaining the list as a whole. The capability approach eschews such objection because it strives to ground the list in the way we as people consider humanity and what it means to live a truly human life. Nussbaum does not adhere to the naturalistic explanation or the metaphysical account of humanity, rather, she is asking herself what it means to live a life that is truly human and what sort of lives would not be considered as human lives. Here also lies the criterion of what falls under the domain of human dignity.

Thus, it could be argued that the capability approach has a perfectionist element to it which ties the items on the list together. Nussbaum often makes reference to human dignity or worth in a sense that there are things which should be universally provided to all humans – that preserve human dignity. She asserts: „What this approach is after is a society in which persons are treated as each worthy of regard, and in which each has been put in a position to live really humanly.(...) we say that beneath a certain level of capability, in each area, a person has not been enabled to live in a truly human way.“ (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 74)

There are other places which she argues for central capabilities more ferociously, for example, by answering the paternalism and cultural imperialism objections to The Capability approach, where she claims that not being beaten and malnourished is not a cultural thing but a basic human need that is represented in every human regardless of their particular characteristics. Moreover, the approach which looks at capabilities rather than functions themselves has an advantage which makes it, in my opinion, the most attractive type of objective list, and probably the only one I would endorse. It is a list of things people should be able to do and be but can refuse, or simply not be bothered. This saves the capability approach from alienation objection that can usually be encountered alongside the objective lists, which states that:

we are reluctant to insist that something is good for someone if that individual would not, even upon reflection, agree with that assessment and is thus resiliently alienated from that claim about what is good for him. (Yelle, 2014, p. 368)

The capability approach evades this objection because it leaves room for individual to choose whether they want to turn the capability into a function or not. In that sense, it pays mind to what people actually want – what they are striving to do and be. One of the best things about the capabilities approach is the freedom to choose. However, it should be emphasized that individuals are to be informed about the various options, choices and consequences in deciding among functionings.

The other reason why I have decided to use the capability approach is an old saying that I have often heard while I was growing up: „A healthy person has a thousand wishes but a sick person has only one.“ It is reasonable to pose an objective list that procures basic life necessities and I think that it is an essential part of well-being. In my opinion, people's desires, preferences, interests and lifestyles above the threshold of basic capabilities differ to such an extent that it would be almost impossible to capture its complexity and diversity in a

form of a list. That is why I am an advocate for an objective list that addresses basic human needs and as its goal has the preservation of human dignity.

Further, I think that Nussbaum rightly poses the burden of securing capabilities on governments and leaders of nations. It shows the intimate connection between well-being of each and every person and governing bodies while also calling out governments of nations worldwide to take responsibility for well-beings their citizens.

What I also like about Nussbaum's approach is her outcry for involvement of philosophers in policy making and politics which is a feat I wholeheartedly support. I think that concerning the capabilities approach philosophers and philosophy as an academic discipline can make a significant contribution in terms of involvement in institutions, policy making, governing bodies and law, together with research into quality of life. Some would contest that assertion, claiming that it is not up to philosophers to engage in such work. It is beyond the scope of this work to argue against that so I will just briefly mention just a few thoughts. For one, I think someone should put an end to playing “hot potato” with problems between different sciences and disciplines, creating a diffusion of responsibility between them, while problems are just sitting there waiting to be solved, especially those problems that concern real, live people and in some cases are matters of life and death. A healthier and a more productive approach is the interdisciplinary one that promotes collaboration between sciences which is where I think philosophers can provide fresh perspectives and novel insights.

While I support the capability approach and think of it as a praise-worthy project, in terms of the discussion on well-being I do not think it reveals the whole story or solves the problem of what it means to live a good life in its entirety, as it successfully tackles just the objective part of it while not paying particular attention to the subjective side.

The capability approach, as I have mentioned, is essential to helping the socially, politically and economically disadvantaged and I believe it is on the right track. However, if we look at the situations in the developed world, specifically, to people who have most of their capabilities taken care of close or over the threshold, there are severe differences in their well-being from their own point of view. Granted, the capability approach, it is argued can be applied to the nations who are around or above the threshold of central capabilities, they are not exclusive to the impoverished regions. (Robeyns, 2016) I am not against it, I am just trying to say that maybe other systems could be also or even more helpful which is what I am advocating here.

The people I encounter daily in my life differ greatly with respect to how they feel from the inside, how they think their life is going and how satisfied they are with their lives. The danger of their basic capabilities being compromised are really not that probable. Their human and civil rights are respected to a large extent and they are reaping the benefits of living in the free society. However, some of them are less satisfied with their lives, some are deeply troubled, some are ecstatic while others are somber. How do we account for these differences? What do we do about these people?

Nussbaum does not really concern herself with what happens over the capabilities threshold as she states that: „we may reasonably defer questions about what we shall do when all citizens are above the threshold, given that this already imposes a taxing and nowhere-realized standard.” (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 12)

While we are in the business of figuring out what it means to live a good life we should not ignore any problems that might impact well-being but do our best to solve them which is why I am opting for the value fulfillment theory as complementary to the capability approach, as a way of addressing the subjective side.

#### 4. The Value Fulfillment Theory of Well-being

The value fulfillment theory falls under the domain of subjective theories of well-being and it can also be identified with subject-dependent theories, which I have touched upon earlier. The theory is supported, most notably, by Valerie Tiberius and Jason Railbey. Their theories differ to an extent so I will focus on the Tiberius's work, specifically on her article *How theories of well-being can help us help* (2014). Her paper has two aims – first being the description of the value-fulfillment theory of well-being and the second presenting how this theory can 'help us help' or be applied in everyday contexts in order to improve our own and others well-being.

She starts off her article by stating that well-being is an ideal – „it is something we strive for and we certainly do not achieve it. (...) Even if we are lucky and things go well for us, the ideal of a good life serves as a goal for our aspirations about how things might go even better.“ (Tiberius, 2014, p. 2).

This makes sense to me and in a way it is illuminating because if we take a look at all the theories of well-being, there is an idealized element to them meaning that they tend to set the bar pretty high with regards to living a good life, and rightly so because they leave room for improvement.

Nevertheless, the theories of well-being differ with regards to the attainability of the ideal, a distinction evocative of the one between subjective and objective, as Tiberius outlines it:

The more we define well-being in terms of people's subjective psychological states, the less ideal it seems and the less it looks like something of value that could be an important aim in human life. On the other hand, the more we define a person's well-being in terms of objective features of the world that do not have to do with his or her psychological states, the less it looks like something with which a person should obviously be concerned or something he or she has a reason to promote. (2014, p. 2)

Thus, there is always a trade-off in opting for either an objective or subjective theory of well-being, as I have already described earlier. Tiberius aims at developing a theory which is trying to reconcile the two sides of theories by saying that „well-being is an ideal – something it makes sense to say is valuable – but an ideal that is anchored in our psychology.“(Tiberius, 2014)



Thus, she proposes an „idealized subjective theory that takes values (rather than desires or satisfactions) as the key psychological state, and a model of value full life (rather than an informed or authentic agent) as its ideal.“ (Tiberius 2014, p. 5)

#### **4.1. Why values?**

To zoom in on values how Tiberius sees them, I will help myself with her book “The reflective life – living wisely within our limits” (2008) Although in the book she makes them work for The Reflective Wisdom account she notes on several places that her take on values are closely related. (Tiberius 2014; Tiberius & Hall, 2015)

There are several reasons for choosing values as a basis of well-being. One of the most important one is that in contrast with desire or pleasure, „it makes sense to talk about what it is appropriate to value and we tend to think that we should have reasons for valuing what we value.“ (Tiberius, 2014, p.6) Thus, values are, besides being supported by reasons, held to some standards or „norms of appropriateness“ by which we assess whether our values can be improved and in what way, whether there are some that could be better for us etc. (Tiberius, 2008, p.23) Tiberius considers important to make well-being a normative notion – one in which we can „go wrong and make mistakes on account of what is good for us.“ (Tiberius, 2014, p. 6)

This is where the idealized part of her theory comes in. She introduces the notion of reflective value as a “kind of regulative ideal in the sense that it represents the ways in which our values might be improved” (Tiberius, 2008, p. 23) She takes values to have certain characteristics, namely stability, justification, positive affective states, motivation that can be closer to or further apart from the ideal of reflective value, depending on the value in question as she asserts: “This account is intended to explicate the features that a value commitment must have in order to serve as a standard of evaluation in reflection”(Tiberius, 2008, p. 24) She goes on to explain that values exist on a continuum where on the one side are values that would not hold to the slightest under the scrutiny of reflection, while on the other end of the spectrum are reflective values as the ideal.

Further, she emphasizes two significant roles that values play for us: “they serve as action-guiding goals, and they also function as standards of evaluation or justification for other value commitments and for general reflection on how our lives are going” (Tiberius, 2008, p. 24)

meaning that she endorses a coherentist view of justification which I will get back to in a while.

There are several features that make values stand out among other inner states. Values are motivating for the agent and they seem to have a pro-attitude instilled in them. Naturally, if we value something we care about it and we want to attain it. For example, if I value friendship I will put effort into spending quality time with them, will care about them and be willing to help them. Admittedly, that is not a characteristic exclusive to values since desires also have a motivating factor. What separates them significantly is stability and justification. (Tiberius, 2008, p. 25)

Values are stable in the sense that we are not that whimsical in changing our minds about them. Values direct our actions in a way that motivation would not be able to. For example, I value education and knowledge, but I have periods in which I would rather dig ditches than continue with it. Yet, my desire to dig ditches is always overridden by my value of education. School is boring at times, hard, stressful and philosophy is insane but after screaming in my pillow I am happy to delve into the belly of the beast once again. If we were guided solely by our motivation we would never get far, since we would constantly change directions and be sunken ashore by the ever fluttering needle of the compass.

Tiberius thinks of stability as a „defeasible disposition not to reconsider our values“ (2008, p. 26). Stability as such can easily slide into being stubbornly set in your ways, even though your values might be less than appropriate, which is why it is important to note another important characteristic of values – justification. As Tiberius puts it: „justification is a set of considerations or a story that fosters confidence, prevents undermining doubt, and contributes to stability.“ (Tiberius, 2008, p. 27) When talking about justification, Tiberius does not presuppose some rational principles and her criteria of justification are not as demanding as it can sometimes be the case with philosophical theories. She asserts that justification means having “something to say” about why you are pursuing the things that you are. She keeps her view of the justification down-to-earth and accessible to all, philosophers or otherwise. It is important *you* can justify your values:

It may be a story about conviction, emotional certainty or love. It may even be “I want it” together with the conviction that getting what I want is a good thing in life. (Tiberius, 2008, p. 30)

That, however, is not enough since Tiberius (2008) thinks of justification as coherentist, meaning that together with the aforementioned, another criterion is that values do not contradict themselves and that they form a somewhat cohesive set:

The fact that the other commitments we have support, or at least do not conflict with, a particular value will contribute to the justification for that value, as will the strength and depth of our attitudes toward the value itself. (p. 27) (...) The kind of justification that our value commitments have does not require foundational values or principles. Instead, given the nature of reflective values and the affective element of endorsement, it requires just support by our other commitments, experiences and affective responses. (p. 32)

What also needs to be emphasized concerning justification is “confirmation in experience”, meaning that we explore our values through experiences and reconsider, change or switch them up in light of new experiences. For example, imagine that I value partying and going out on weekends. After a series of get-togethers that left much to be desired I begin to reconsider my values and refine them, maybe to the point that I realize that that particular value does not fit well with my other values like waking up early, going for a walk, being productive, spending money on field trips, forming meaningful bonds with my friends etc. Experience can also confirm our values as I am sure we all know that moment when we remember why we like something so much in the middle of doing it.

The aforementioned important features of values complement each other. Stability and justification, especially, go hand in hand as one perpetuates the other. Justification provides a sweet spot between being too stubbornly set in your ways when it comes to upholding certain values and constantly changing your values and second-guessing them since justification provides the ‘why’ for having them. Conversely, if during reflection, justification of a particular value fails, that value is expected to lose stability. Values that are not stable fail to provide the driving- force for acting on them and as such they fail to be action-guiding.

Thus, Tiberius construes a paradigm case of values: “consist in positive affective states that have diachronic stability, as well as conviction that one is justified in having these stable attitudes.” (Tiberius, 2008, p. 33)

Tiberius also mentions that values have a kind of authority over us; they are self-imposed standards that operate in our mind. She notes that would not be the case if they were not justified for justification is the thing that makes the values normative for us. In other words, we care about something, we know why we care about it – we can justify it in some way and we strive towards realizing it.

All values have the aforementioned characteristics – motivation, stability, justification which Tiberius considers central to her view, however, values do differ with degrees in which these features are represented: “Our actual value commitments can be closer to or farther from the ideal of a reflective value because they can be more or less stable, justified, and compatible with our affective orientation.” (Tiberius, 2008, p. 33)

#### **4.2. The value fulfillment theory**

Taking all of that into account, she develops her Value fulfillment theory of well-being which takes the value full life as its ideal, according to which: „a person's life goes well to the extent that she pursues and fulfills or realizes things that she values where those values are emotionally suitable, mutually realizable, and seen by the person to make her life go well.“(Tiberius, 2014, p. 7)

In other words, value full lives, which she posits as an ideal against which we should evaluate our lives, are those in which we realize the most of what matters to us over time. To live a good life is to live according to and in pursuit of what you care about.

What is important to note is that reflective values are a regulative ideal with regards to values themselves, while in the value fulfillment theory the ideal is a value full life, a life that allows for realization of values. Reflective values are standards of value evaluation while the ideal in the value fulfillment theory is concerned with assessment of our lives with regards to realization of values.

Values have standards which govern their fulfillment or as she phrases it: „there are standards for values in the sense that there are ways of responding appropriately or inappropriately give the nature of what is valued.“ (Tiberius, 2014, p. 7)

For example, I may value education and think that the only way the value is fulfilled is if I have straight A's. I get a B and I have a negative emotional reaction because I believe I am

failing to fulfill a value while, in reality, the standards I am measuring myself up against are too rigorous and probably unreasonable.

Conversely, imagine a mother who values family and dedicates her life to the well-being of her children and her spouse to the point when she becomes overbearing, manipulating and micro-managing, making the lives of her loved ones unbearable.

Tiberius concludes that value fulfillment „is succeeding by the standards of your values while continuing to think that these standards are important to how your life goes.“ (Tiberius, 2014, p. 8)

Furthermore, values and relationships between them can be highly convoluted and living a value full life is no walk in the park. We hold some values in higher esteem than others, some may be more important to us, some are abstract, there are those that can be instrumental, etc. Additionally, with regards to values you can have 'too much of a good thing' meaning that values have to be in harmonious relation to each other. I may value education, friends and fun but that does not mean that my well-being will be improved if I quit college and start partying strenuously or if I stop hanging out with my friends and just concentrate on getting good grades while making sure I'm not having fun doing it. There are certainly situations which fulfill all three of the values simultaneously but might sometimes impede on my value of solitude, health, silence etc. As we can see, trade-offs between values are bound to happen and we are the ones that have to prioritize, customize and re-evaluate our value systems.

Nonetheless, not all is lost or in Tiberius's words: “The compelling ideal of a value full life – a life in which we do well by what matters to us – does constrain which values it makes sense for a person to have.“ as she outlines the example of a person with anorexia nervosa whose life is ridden with conflicting values between thinness, mental health and life itself. (Tiberius, 2014, p. 9)

### 4.3. What do we value?

In her book, Tiberius also devotes a section for empirical studies in the field of psychology that are concerned with people's values. She cites three of these studies: Rokeach's Values Survey, Schwartz and Bilsky's work on basic human values, and the World Values Survey, in an effort to find some directions to what could be universally valued. (Tiberius, 2008, p. 48) The results of the studies do not leave her empty handed as she finds that most people value friends and family. Additionally, many people also have some moral „goals or ideals“ which they are striving to act in accordance with. Consequently, she concludes that values are plural as there are many different sets of values people endorse.

In order to avoid the mistake from *is* to *ought*, Tiberius uses a bottom up approach in which she gathers data from the empirical studies and then discusses whether these values can uphold the scrutiny of reflection by which we are filtering them out.

Further, in her article, she also addresses the notion of things that might be universally valued: “(..) there are many shared values, especially when it comes to relatively basic values: almost everyone values health, happiness, friendship, family, and meaningful work.” (Tiberius, 2014, p. 7)

I do not think that the results of these studies are that surprising as I do believe that most people highly value family and friends and many people that I know opt for the family-centered lifestyle. I will not discuss further the results themselves but I will point to their merit of pointing us into the direction of where we should look for when we are searching for what matters to people in their lives. If we are clueless or in a rut, not knowing what to do with our lives, it seems reasonable to see what other people value and how they are doing with regards to those things. Maybe it could give us ideas as to what we ourselves want.

However, it should be noted that the results of scientific studies should not be taken at face value because they are descriptive in their nature. They are and could never be normative and to treat them as such would be a critical mistake, which is well-known.

Further, there are values that she takes as implicit in her Reflective Wisdom account that she develops in her book, according to which: “to live your life well is to live in such a way that you approve of how your life is going from your own reflective point of view.” (Tiberius,

2008, p. 35) Keeping that in mind, she takes the values of self-direction and life-satisfaction to be presupposed by her account. Self-direction means living “in accordance with your own values and standards” (Tiberius, 2008, p. 35). It means being autonomous in your doings, and actually striving to live by practicing what you believe and value. Life-satisfaction is positive assessment of your life as a whole, which, in Tiberius’s view, includes good reflection. These two values are connected to the rest of her book in which she is developing her Reflective Wisdom account that is set on outlining ways of improving our reflective capacities. I will not go into that at this point, rather I will turn to another thing I particularly like from her article *How theories of well-being can help us help* (2014).

#### 4.4. How theories of well-being can help us help

Besides outlining the value fulfillment theory of well-being, Tiberius's paper has another aim which I wholeheartedly support, which is to figure out how her theory can be applied to real situations.

I believe theories of well-being should have action-guiding implications and that each person constructing a theory of well-being should keep its application in mind. Tiberius asks herself: „What practical purposes do theories of well-being have? For what purpose would we need to translate the ideal life given by a theory of well-being into reality?“ and answers: „Basically, we need to bring the ideal down to reality when we want to help somebody (or help ourselves), to make their (our) lives better.“ (Tiberius, 2014, p. 10)

I believe that is the approach to take in investigation of the subject of well-being, particularly the subjective part which I am talking about in this section. Sometimes the discussion on well-being tends to lose track of the aim or purpose that is behind it. I could be wrong but I feel that the purpose of the discussion is to make our lives and the lives of those around us better – that is why we are looking for answers.

That is why I particularly like that Tiberius is keeping her eyes on the prize with this paper. Nonetheless, she is aware that if we adopt the value fulfillment theory of well-being, using it to help ourselves or others is certainly not an easy job to do. As I have mentioned earlier, values are highly complex and they are woven into intricate networks. Further, Tiberius notes: „there are many different shapes that the ideal of a value full life can take and, to make matters worse, what is in that set of value full lives will change over time as the person makes choices that close off some options and opens others.“ (Tiberius, 2014, p. 10) Regardless, she sets out to explore how her theory breathes in practical contexts, focusing „mainly on friends as potential benefactors and beneficiaries“ while noting that her claims can also be applied to other relationships (even the one you have with yourself). (Tiberius, 2014, p. 10)

Tiberius offers guidelines as to what should benefactor take in mind upon evaluating the beneficiaries situation:

- a) what that person's core values are, b) how well she is succeeding in terms of these values, and c) how likely it is that the status quo will lead to a life of high total value fulfillment over time. (2014, p. 11)



Basically, we need to have in mind what the person cares about, consider whether the things they value are right for them taking into account what they want achieve, realize or become and, ultimately, think of areas of improvement that could get the person to where they want to be.

At first glance this sounds mighty simple; however, it is far from it. Tiberius notes several challenges, first of which is epistemological: „there are a variety of things that the benefactor might not know that will affect his or her ability to assess how much the beneficiary's life resembles the ideal and how it could be improved.“ such as: what is good life for that person, what challenges lie in making a better life for that person and what needs to change in order to achieve that. (Tiberius, 2014, p. 11)

Keeping the epistemological challenge in mind, a good starting point could be to see how the person is doing with respect to the „basic values that are likely to be part of the best life for anyone“ (Tiberius, 2014, p. 12) while, I would add, keeping a healthy dose of openness to diversity of values and experiences. The basic values are the ones I've touched upon earlier and it is interesting that even though Tiberius's account is subjective, there are things that are apparently universal to a certain degree among people which, in turn, goes together with the capabilities approach but I will get back to this in a while.

Besides the epistemological challenge, she discloses another type, what she refers to as the interpersonal challenge which consists in: „ascertaining whether it is desirable (in terms of the goal or promoting well-being) to discount, ignore or override a person's actual current values.“ (Tiberius, 2014, p. 13)

I think this challenge is easily anticipated – rarely anyone wants or likes to be told that what they are doing or even valuing is not really appropriate or good for them. This challenge might as well become the slogan of parenting a teenager but it is also far from being uncommon in relationships between friends, spouses, colleagues etc. Tiberius argues that we need to be wary of it and assess the cost and benefit of such effort as it could result in: „ruptures to the bonds of friendship, pain and dissatisfaction.“ (Tiberius, 2014, p. 12) which could, in turn, also impede on their value fulfillment.

In discussing these challenges and ways of dealing with them, which I will not disclose in great detail here, she comes up with conditions in which it could be acceptable to „discount, ignore or override a beneficiary's actual values“:

1. The beneficiary's values are truly harmful
2. The beneficiary could change
3. There is an appropriate relationship between the helper and the beneficiary, defined in terms of: intimacy, trust, skills of communication, and the extent to which lives are intertwined.
4. The helper is in good epistemic position with respect to the above. (Tiberius, 2014, p. 15)

Taking these conditions in mind, I think that in some cases one can override person's values in case only the first condition is satisfied. For example, take the person I have previously mentioned who suffers from anorexia nervosa. Her value of being thin is truly harmful to her health and it is endangering her life. In this case, we might be justified to intervene in some way if it means saving their life.

I think the merit of the conditions above is that it makes some of the things transparent and explicitly advises us to take them into account, even though we are probably already aware of some of these conditions, if not all while engaging in interpersonal relationships.

While I think these conditions hold, it is by no means easy to assess whether they are realized in real life situations. I do not remember the last time these conditions were satisfied while having a heart-to-heart with someone. It seems a tad idealistic, which is fine if we take them as provisional and not as exact science. Additionally, the conditions can seem too general and might not take us far from where we started in the first place.

As can be seen, I am a bit skeptical to the application of Tiberius's value fulfillment theory in practice in the way I have outlined it above but I do think she is onto something. Whether you find her feat convincing, instructional for real life situations, or trivial and banal, I think her motivation behind it and effort is highly commendable and I believe it is the way subjective well-being should be approached. While I maybe would not put my money on this particular account of how theories of well-being can help us help, as I feel it should be more specified, I would without doubt put my money on further exploration of this project.

Further, one could argue that the value-fulfillment can be susceptible to the „anything goes“ kind of criticism where one can value things which are immoral or harmful like hurting

others, stealing or something similar to the sort. I would say that these values would not uphold the criteria of values Tiberius proposes and argues to make sense to nurture. These would impede on other values a person might have and make all the other values unrealizable. For example, going to jail might prevent you from living up to some of your values like raising a family. Tiberius, as I have already mentioned, proposes the coherentist approach to justification meaning that values should not be in conflict with each other. It is also unfavorable if one value impedes on realization of numerous others for example, suicidal person endangers the realizations of any other values that they hold.

It might also be important to note the initial purpose of Tiberius's account of well-being. Her work is directed to those that are interested in living a good life, to those who are willing to make an effort and investigate what it means to live such a life, the ones looking for answers. She thinks that the discussion should give answers to those seeking them and she keeps them in mind.

Now that I've covered the value fulfillment approach, let us see how the capability approach and the value fulfillment approach can complement each other as it is my impression that they can.

## 5. Capabilities and Values

I would argue that capabilities are ground zero for living according to our values. It seems that our basic human needs are essential in living the life according to what matters to us. I will not go further into this because it seems uncontroversial. Growing up in the society which is organized around ensuring capabilities is sure to instill some values in the individual, for example the value of freedom and autonomy. It does not seem paternalistic to me to ensure that people value capabilities, not particular things on the list but that they value the ability of everyone to choose independently how they want to live their lives.

Just like there are fertile functioning and corrosive disadvantages in the talk of capabilities, we can posit similar concepts when talking about values. We can imagine 'fertile' values like health or education that makes all the other values realizable and enhances the chance of their fulfillment, and 'corrosive' ones like power and domination that probably does not make one's life go very well. The relationship between values, just as the relationship between capabilities, is highly complex. They both have to be in a harmonious state to achieve a good life. More of one value or capability does not compensate for the lack of others.

What is most interesting is that the capabilities approach and values meet half way. As I have mentioned, Nussbaum gives special significance to two of the ten capabilities: affiliation and practical reason. Affiliation encompasses relationships with others, including those with friends and family, as well as integration in the society. Tiberius argues that most people value family and friends, considering that as a reflective value and a basic value, important part of people's lives. Thus, by ensuring the capability of affiliation, you are paving the way for people to realize their value of friends and family.

Further, Nussbaum considers practical reason as necessary for choosing how to realize our capabilities and turn them into various functionings. I think that goes together nicely with values in Tiberius's Reflective Wisdom account, namely, the value of self-direction which means living by your own standards or marching to the beat of your own drum, so to speak, paired with life-satisfaction, which is positive assessment of your own life and positive affective state upon reflection. Self-direction can give practical reason a boost and serve as a motivating factor in choosing among options. It also entails autonomy and freedom of thought which is what practical reason is about.

Values, in general, serve as a driving-force and could go really well with capabilities because they give them the motivating factor. Values direct people towards particular functionings and the capability approach ensures that those functionings are realizable. Having values means caring about different things while capabilities are opportunities to realize what you care about. Capabilities are concerned with what people are able to do and be while values are concerned with what people aspire to do and be, what they want to do and be.

Additionally, Tiberius asserts: “Almost everyone values health and enjoyment for themselves and their friends and family. Deprivations that make it impossible to attain these values are an obvious road block to achieving well-being.” (Tiberius, 2014, p. 16) Here we see that Tiberius and Nussbaum arrive to the same conclusion from the two opposite poles of objective and subjective theories. Nussbaum calls the aforementioned capabilities – bodily integrity, life, affiliation, play, etc. while Tiberius addresses them in the context of values. Tiberius starts from the subjective side taking values as the cornerstone of her theory, informed by the empirical studies in the field of psychology while Nussbaum starts from the objective side, taking the capabilities as the main ingredient of her theory, informed by the studies in political sciences, economics and political philosophy. I think moments like these are monumental in philosophical discussions. As one of my professors noted, moments like these are like digging a tunnel from the opposite sides of a mountain and meeting in the middle. (Berčić, 2018)

Nussbaum’s capability solution to helping those who lack basic necessities is in my opinion, the one that is superior to the value fulfillment account, which is why I have decided to endorse the capability approach in the first place and combine it with the value fulfillment theory.

However, as I have previously addressed, Tiberius pays attention to people’s well-being above the threshold level, she is concerned with helping ourselves and our friends in realizing our values and in living the life we want to have, which would be impossible to do without our capabilities being met.

Therefore, these two theories combined can provide us insight and a great starting point for finding figuring out the solution to the problem of well-being in its entirety, both from the subjective and objective side aspect.

## **6. Directions for action**

Similar to Nussbaum, I think that the capabilities approach should be enforced by the government and policy makers. It is something which should be endorsed on the level of the state, which is what Nussbaum is advocating for.

However, I think that sometimes it is ill-advised to wait for the governments to do their job since people's actual capabilities are often ignored at the level of the state. If we rely solely on the government to do their work it could foster a climate of helplessness and complacency, dissuading people from striving to make a positive change in their local communities.

I think the capabilities could also be ensured by fellow citizens of those who are less fortunate and lack in basic human necessities. This could be done and promoted by civic associations, non-government associations, non-profit associations etc. Basically, affiliations of citizens that would operate locally at the level of cities or neighborhoods either in forms of charity and volunteer work or in the form of state funded associations.

Above the threshold of basic social minimum the individual has more responsibility over their own life and well-being. There are several reasons for that. One reason is that you can't help anyone unless they want to be helped. Tiberius identifies the problem of helping someone really well – you might not know what is good for them and even if you do, telling them might breach some personal boundaries or might make you a villain.

Another reason is that people's problems differ to a great extent above the threshold which makes the prospect of one-size-fits-all solution highly unlikely. Thus, in approaching the improvement of well-being above the threshold one can assume the highly individualized approach which resembles that of a therapy – of which there are many kinds, not exclusively psychotherapy. Another approach is to make the models and techniques that might improve people's well-being readily available in forms of books, public lectures, workshops, social media and any other forms you can think of, from which people can then pick and choose what suits them. I think that it should be a goal to strive to make information that is well-researched, scientific, relevant, held to high academic standards available and approachable by the academic laypersons, especially on the subject of improvement of their well-being.

All of this calls for collaborations between disciplines and systematization of knowledge from various sources and fields of inquiry. Thus, I readily applaud the interdisciplinary nature of this discussion together with the public debate on many of these issues.

I would like to end with a quote from Jules Evans since I couldn't have said it better myself. It is taken from his book on ancient philosophy but I think it can be applied to the contemporary discussion on well-being:

My hope is that we can find a better balance between the ancient idea of the good life, and a modern, pluralist, and liberal politics. It would recognize that well-being is not a simple concept that can be objectively defined, pinned down, and measured by empirical science, and the world would be a much more boring place if it was. We should explore the plurality of philosophical approaches to well-being. We should treat citizens as rational adults who deserve to be brought into the conversation as equals. Empiricism balanced with practical reasoning. Science balanced with the humanities. Not one version of the good life, but several. Not a mass enforced march to an official well-being target, but groups of friends helping each other in their search for the good. That's what I would like to see. ( Evans, 2013, "Meeting Jean Vanier", para. 6)

## **Conclusion:**

This thesis is an attempt for two theories, at first glance incompatible, to come together. On the one hand, there are subjective theories that put the well-being in the eye of the beholder, focusing on the internal, subjective states of the individual. On the other hand, there are objective theories that take well-being to be outside of the subject, independent of their attitude on the matter. Here, I tried to reconcile these two opposite camps by taking an objectivist account called the capability approach, represented by Martha Nussbaum, and a subjective theory called the value fulfillment theory, endorsed by Valerie Tiberius. My attempt was to show that these theories are compatible and that they complement each other, covering both the objective and the subjective aspect of well-being. Granted, there is significant work to be done in further exploration of these two theories and especially, concerning their practical application. Nonetheless, this work might serve as an invaluable starting point for future investigation of the subject of well-being.



## References:

Berčić, B. (2018) Conversation during a break on a conference. Dubrovnik.

Blackburn, S. (2005). *The Oxford dictionary of philosophy*. OUP Oxford.

Campbell, S. M. (2016). *The concept of well-being*. In *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Well-being*. ed. Fletcher, G.

Crisp, Roger, "Well-Being", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/well-being/>>. last visited: 4.9. 2018.

Hall, A., & Tiberius, V. (2015). Well-being and subject dependence. In *The Routledge handbook of philosophy of well-being*. ed. Fletcher, G. Taylor and Francis Inc.

Robeyns, Ingrid, "The Capability Approach", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/capability-approach/>>. last visited 5.9.

Rodogno, R. (2015). Prudential value or well-being. *Handbook of Value: Perspectives from Economics, Neuroscience, Philosophy, Psychology and Sociology*, 287.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2001). *Women and human development: The capabilities approach* (Vol. 3). Cambridge University Press.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2011). *Creating capabilities*. Harvard University Press.

Taylor, T. (2011). *Knowing what is good for you: A theory of prudential value and well-being*. Springer.

Tiberius, V. (2014). How Theories of Well-Being Can Help Us Help.

Tiberius, V. (2008). *The reflective life: Living wisely with our limits*. Oxford University Press.

Yelle, B. (2014). Alienation, Deprivation, and the Well-being of Persons. *Utilitas*, 26(4), 367-384.