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# Turning Capabilities into Functionings: Practical Reason as an Activation Factor

## Abstract

Practical reasoning is central to the capabilities approach. This paper sets out an account of the role of practical reasoning in capability. Practical reasoning involves the development and evolution of an individual's conception of the good – the kind of life she values and has reason to value. It is developed through socialization, and is subject to background social conditioning that may be empowering or constraining. As such, practical reasoning can be a subjective constraint on capability. This paper introduces a distinction between a person's objective capability set and her effective capability set. Objective capabilities are determined by a configuration of commodities and conversion factors at the individual, social and environmental levels. Practical reasoning guides the act of choice that determines which element of the objective capability set will be actualized; effective capabilities are the real opportunities available to a person, given the filtering effects of her mode of practical reasoning. Practical reason can be conceptualised as an "Activation Factor" that mediates between hypothetical capability and achieved functioning. The paper concludes that practical reasoning deserves particular attention in social evaluations in the capability space: acknowledging the role of practical reasoning can help to illuminate gaps between freedom in principle and real positive freedom.

**Keywords:** Practical Reason; Capabilities Approach; Socialization; Aspiration; Opportunity; Positive freedom.

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# **Turning Capabilities into Functionings: Practical Reason as an Activation Factor**

## **Introduction**

Practical reasoning is central to the capabilities approach (Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2000). The capabilities approach (CA) conceptualises well-being and social justice in terms of people's freedom to live "the kinds of lives they value and have reason to value" (Sen 1999), with practical reasoning integral to the development of a person's conception of value. The aim of this paper is to develop an account of the role of practical reasoning in capability: where and how does practical reasoning enter into the development and exercise of capability, and how can it be incorporated into evaluations of well-being and justice in the capability space? Nussbaum gives practical reason a special role in her capabilities approach, conceptualising it as a kind of organizing principle. However, there is no general account of the formal role of practical reasoning in the CA - a significant gap in capability theory. This paper aims to fill that gap, and to flesh out the somewhat vague notion of practical reason "organizing and suffusing" other capabilities (Nussbaum 2000, 82).

Particular attention is paid to the social nature of practical reasoning, and the circumstances that influence young people's deliberations about their lives, and their "capacity to aspire" (Appadurai 2004). The paper demonstrates how a capabilities approach with a carefully specified role for practical reasoning can help to illuminate aspects of intergenerational social mobility and justice that risk being missed by other approaches.

Section 1 defines practical reason and its role in capability. Section 2 develops a new account of the role of practical reasoning in capability. Section 3 discusses the implications of the new account for the CA and for other conceptions of justice. The paper concludes that practical reasoning deserves special attention: evaluations of well-being and justice in the capability space should include practical reasoning as an "activation factor" that mediates between capability and functioning.

## **1. Practical reason and its role in capability**

In the simplest terms, practical reasoning is deliberation about what it would be best to do, both in particular situations, and with reference to one's life as a whole. Practical reasoning involves deliberation about ends (Richardson 1993), that is, the development of a conception of the good life, including reasons for valuing a certain kind of life and being a certain kind of person (Korsgaard 2009), and basic reasons for action (Finnis 1980). Nussbaum's (2000, 79) neo-Aristotelian definition

of the capability for practical reason is: “Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life.”

Sen emphasises the importance of practical reasoning in the CA during his discussion of agency: agency freedom is “the freedom to achieve whatever the person, as a responsible agent, decides that he or she should achieve” and, he says, the conception of the person must include what Rawls terms “the moral power to have a conception of the good” (Sen 1985b: 186-204). Practical reasoning also comes into Sen’s approach in the conceptualisation of capability as the freedom to live the kinds of lives people “value and have reason to value” (Sen 1999, 18). This can be read as referring to both an individual’s own subjective reasons for valuing a certain kind of life, and the objective reasons that, independently of the individual’s own personal reasons, make that kind of life a good and flourishing life (Austin 2016). This reflects the distinction between “motivating reasons” and “normative reasons” (Smith 1994); practical reasoning involves deliberation about normative reasons and the development of motivating reasons for the kind of life one values and the actions one will take to achieve it.

Practical reasoning is a formative part of the life-trajectory of a person, since it involves deliberation about long-term goals and life plans. Practical reasoning during formative years is especially significant in shaping a life. It is during this period of socialization and enculturation that young people develop “embodied cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1979); that is, the “skills, knowledge, attitudes, values, and motives current in the groups of which they are or will become members” (Sewell 1963). Practical reasoning can be conceptualised as the central element of a person’s “habitus”, defined by Bourdieu (2000, 19) as:

a set of dispositions, reflexes and forms of behaviour that people acquire through acting in society. It reflects the different positions people have in society, for example, whether they are brought up in a middle class environment or in a working class suburb.

Practical reasoning is essentially social. The social, political and economic environment in which a person grows up, and the practices and norms of her immediate and wider social groups, are primary influences on the development of her mode of practical reasoning - the basic structure of her personal conception of value. On a social definition of personhood, such as that adopted by Aristotle (e.g. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1097b11), the development and on-going exercise of practical reasoning can be seen as embedded in sociality; practical reasoning is not individualistic, but social-relational in character. As Sen (2002, 80) puts it, “No individual can think, choose or act without

being influenced in one way or another by the society around him or her.” Social relationships provide the narrative web that enables a person to make sense of herself; a person’s self-concept is derived from and sustained by her social relationships, and the goals and life plans a person develops are shaped by these fundamental influences.

The value commitments formed during the formative life-stage generally persist into adulthood (Inglehart 1977; Mannheim 1952; Van den Broek 1999) and the decisions made by “emergent adults” about the life paths they will strive to follow have great significance for their own future well-being, as well as that of their children and even grandchildren (e.g. Celhay and Gallegos 2015); from the point of view of social justice, intergenerational social mobility is at stake. It is therefore important to consider the background influences on why and how these formative decisions are made.

The next section outlines where practical reasoning fits into Sen’s and Nussbaum’s capability approaches.

### **Practical reason: Process Freedom and Internal Capability**

The classical model of capabilities (Sen 1985a) involves, in outline, a person possessing a set of commodities, which have various characteristics (for example, a bicycle has the characteristic of providing mobility). A set of conversion factors at the individual, social and environmental levels determine the rate of conversion of these commodities into valuable beings and doings (functionings); the set of all potential functionings that an individual can achieve, given her particular configuration of commodities and conversion factors, is her capability set – the set of freedoms from which she can choose. The more diverse and valuable the options in a person’s capability set, the better off she is said to be; human development involves the enlargement of people’s capabilities (Sen 1999). These principles can be summarised formally as shown in Figure 1: (Sen 1985a, summarised by Kuklys and Robeyns 2005):

**Figure 1: Sen’s Capabilities Approach**

$x \in X$	$x$ is a set of commodities and $X$ is the set of all possible commodity vectors.
$c = c(x)$	is a vector of characteristics of commodities, where
$c$	is a function that maps characteristics of commodities into the characteristics space [for example, the relevant characteristic of a bicycle is that it provides mobility];
$b=f(c(x   z_i, z_e, z_s))$	is a vector of activities and states of being (functionings) where
$f \in F$	is a conversion function that maps characteristics of commodities into the space of functionings, $F$ is the set of all possible conversion functions, and
$z_i, z_e, z_s$	are conversion factors at the individual (i), social (s) and environmental (e) levels, which determine the rate of conversion from characteristics to functionings.
$Q$	is the capability set comprising all potential functionings an individual can achieve.
Therefore, for individual $i$ : $Q_i(X_i) = \{(b_i \forall x_i \text{ and } \forall f_i)\}$	

Sen discusses both the opportunity and process aspects of freedom (Sen 2004). The opportunity aspect relates to people’s freedom to achieve that which they value and have reason to value. The process aspect of freedom concerns people’s ability to freely exercise their practical reasoning and make choices about their way of living. This involves “personal process concerns” such as a person’s deliberations about her agency goals, as well as “systematic process concerns”, which include the social and political institutions and norms that support or impede functioning (Sen 2004). For Sen, then, practical reasoning is a *personal process* aspect of freedom.

Nussbaum’s parallel approach distinguishes between internal capabilities (I-capabilities) and the external conditions that enable or block successful functioning (Nussbaum 1987). I-capabilities are the internal powers of a person, which result from the person being trained and educated to realize her innate (“basic”) human capabilities; they are “developed states of the person herself that are, so far as the person herself is concerned, sufficient conditions for the exercise of the requisite functions” (Nussbaum 2000:84). The interaction of internal capabilities and suitable external conditions results in “combined capabilities” (Nussbaum 2000). Unlike Sen, Nussbaum does not distinguish between commodities and conversion factors; rather, the multiple internal and external aspects of capability

are co-constituents of overall combined capability. The capability for practical reasoning is defined by Nussbaum as a basic capability of all human beings, which can (and should) be trained and developed into an I-capability – it is part of internal capability (Austin 2016). The capability for practical reason also depends on features of the external environment, requiring at least “protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance” (Nussbaum 2000, 79); practical reasoning is a combined capability. This paper will show that focusing on this particular constituent of internal capability can be useful in diagnosing the reasons why individuals may “neglect to avail themselves of opportunities that they in some sense have” (Nussbaum 2000:68).

### **Practical reason, choice and capability**

Evaluations of well-being in the capabilities space often focus on how configurations of commodities and conversion factors result in capability sets of different size and quality. Inequalities in capability and functioning are often traced back to inequalities in commodities and conversion factors, such as income poverty (e.g. Robeyns 2005; Tiwari 2014), lack of education (e.g. Unterhalter 2005), weak institutions (e.g. Tsai 2011; UNDP 1993), and other socio-environmental constraints (e.g. Lehtonen 2004; Smith 2015). There is often a special focus on injustices involving the constraining of capabilities by external forces beyond the control of the individual (e.g. Nussbaum 2001; Sen 1999). However, while commodities and conversion factors provide the basic parameters of capabilities, this is only part of the story, since nothing has yet been said about the act of choice that will select, from the set of possibilities, a particular option to be actualized (transformed into an achieved functioning).

The importance of the choice stage of capability has often been emphasised since the early development of the CA. Sen (1992) states that “We do, of course, need to know what is *chosen* from each set” (emphasis added) and Robeyns (2005) observes that:

...in real life two people with identical capability sets are likely to end up with different types and levels of achieved functionings, as they make different choices following their different ideas of the good life...

The act of choice that selects particular functionings from the capability set is guided by practical reasoning, through which a person develops, and strives to live in accordance with, her conception of the good.

It is important to notice that there are at least two possible sources of unfreedom in the act of choice, which are distinguishable in the following quote (Burchardt 2009):

If I have never seen or heard a piano, I am unlikely to form the goal of becoming a concert pianist...if no-one in my family has ever been to university, it is much less likely (although of course not impossible), that I will set myself the objective of obtaining a degree.

This quote illustrates two different scenarios. In the first case, the individual is not prevented from becoming a pianist by some external barrier (for example, a physical impairment or a shortage of pianos), but by an internal, conceptual barrier, namely her ignorance of pianos. In the second case, the concept of *university* may be available to her, but the option simply does not fall within her horizon of ambition, due to her mode of practical reasoning and practical identity considerations. It is the latter form of constraint on which this analysis will focus.

### **Practical reason, practical identity and socialization**

Consider two young people, Deborah and Christine, who are facing the decision of what to do when they leave school. Deborah and Christine have equal natural talent in terms of achievements in school performance and examination grades, despite coming from very different home backgrounds. The set of opportunities hypothetically open to both, given their exam results, include going to university, studying for a vocational qualification, or looking for unskilled work. For Deborah, the choice is simple – all her life, it has been expected (perhaps even assumed) that she will follow in her parents' footsteps and go to university. She duly completes the application forms and wins a place. For Christine, the situation is different. No one she knows well has ever been to university, and it has never been discussed as an option for her. If anyone among her family and friends had thought about it, it would be argued that getting into such great debt simply isn't worth it, and that it would be much better to start working as soon as possible. There may also be prejudice among her family and friends that university is not for people "like us". Christine leaves school and gets a job in a call-centre.

The story of Deborah and Christine highlights the distinction between opportunities that are *objectively* available to an individual, and opportunities that are *effectively* available, given the filtering effect of socially shaped practical reasoning. The option of going to university, although objectively available to Christine (there were no external obstacles to her applying), was simply not within her imagined horizon of possibility – this option did not fit with her practical identity, and therefore fell outside of her practical reasoning about what constitutes a good and worthwhile life. Her practical reasoning had *filtered out* the university option, and left it outside the bounds of (imagined) possibility. Neither Deborah nor Christine faced any objective barriers to going to



university – both had the required qualifications, both were healthy, no one was physically preventing them from applying. However, it seems that their capability sets were importantly different, due to their different modes of practical reasoning.

This section has made the case that practical reasoning deserves special attention in evaluations in the space of capabilities and functionings. The next section shows how practical reasoning can be formally incorporated into the theoretical framework of the CA.

## **2. Objective and Effective capabilities**

The example of Deborah and Christine involves the domain of education; this is a particularly appropriate example since education has a long-term multiplier effect on a person's freedoms and opportunities. More generally, an individual's configuration of commodities and conversion factors provide the external parameters of her choice set – I will term these her *Objective Capabilities*. The set of objective capabilities is the set of *potential* functionings: it is dormant or hypothetical until a specific functioning is "activated" by an act of choice. The act of choice is guided by practical reasoning: as Nussbaum (2000) argues, practical reason plays a central organizing role in the capability to live a good life.

The story of Deborah and Christine suggests that practical reasoning may be best thought of as an *activation* factor. At the first stage, commodities are converted into capabilities via conversion factors at the individual, social and environmental levels. Then, at the second stage, once the capability set is thus determined, an act of choice causes the "activation" of one of the potential options in the capability set, setting in motion a chain of actions designed to lead to its transformation into an actually achieved functioning. Practical reasoning is therefore the mediator between a capability set and an achieved functioning; an act of practical reasoning is normally a necessary condition for a particular achieved functioning to result from the hypothetical capability set.

It follows from this that a full definition of capability should incorporate the potentially constraining effects of practical reasoning, and the forces that shape what individuals have (motivating) reasons to value. Evaluations that omit the influence of practical reason may miss important information about the true *effective* freedom of the individual to achieve valuable beings and doings.

A possible objection to the distinction between objective and effective capabilities relates to the inclusion in the latter of mental states and dispositions. This, it has been argued, risks opening the

door to innumerable factors that cause people to choose as they do: some worry that including mental states and dispositions in individual-level internal capabilities would eventually lead to the collapse of the capability set into a single functioning vector, because we would end up concluding that “the only option an individual could have chosen, given all of the external and internal factors operating on them, was the one they in fact chose” (Burchardt 2009:16). However, the aim of distinguishing between objective and effective capabilities is to highlight the importance of a particular kind of mental state and process – those involved in practical reasoning – in determining real freedom. The claim here is that there is theoretical value in distinguishing formally between what Sen calls *freedom “in principle”* and *freedom “in fact”*. Moreover, it would certainly be possible to distinguish empirically between effective capabilities and achieved functionings, since the former remain hypothetical, while the latter are actually realized. Hence, the distinction between objective and effective capabilities is useful in both theory and in practice.

An updated conceptualisation of Sen’s capability approach that incorporates practical reasoning can be outlined as follows:

- a) Commodities (resources) subject to conversion factors (individual, social and environmental variables) create a set of opportunities. These will be termed *Objective Capabilities*.

These opportunities are hypothetical or dormant, and represent the set of potential functionings from which the person can choose.

- b) An act of choice is required to select a particular functioning from the set of potential functionings. This act of choice is guided by practical reasoning.

Practical reason acts as a filter: it determines which of the objective opportunities are “visible” to the person; that is, which are considered to be consistent with her conception of value and practical identity. The filtered set will be termed *Effective Capabilities*.

- c) The act of choice selects and activates a particular option from the set of possibilities which, in the presence of suitable external circumstances and all else being equal, will result in achieved functioning.

This outline highlights the distinction between (1) *objective capabilities* (determined by commodities and conversion factors) and (2) *effective capabilities*, defined as objective capabilities subject to practical reasoning. The term “effective capabilities” echoes Sen’s own use of the term “effective”, which he employs to refer to

the real freedoms that people in *fact* (not just 'in principle') enjoy. If social conditioning makes a person lack the courage to choose (perhaps even to 'desire' what is denied but would be valued *if* chosen), then it would be unfair to make the ethical assessment assuming that she does have that effective choice. It is a matter of concentrating on the real freedoms actually enjoyed, taking note of all barriers - including those of 'social discipline'. (Sen 1992: 149, emphasis in original).

My proposal is that practical reasoning can be conceptualised as an *activation factor*. Just as commodities and conversion factors act as constraints on the external opportunities available to a person, practical reasoning represents an internal, value-based constraint on what an individual can imagine as a realistic opportunity for herself. As a result, two people with the same *objective* capabilities may have different *effective* capabilities, due to their different modes of practical reasoning. The mere presence of an objective opportunity is not sufficient to give a person the real freedom to choose it.

Of course, two people with the same effective capability sets might still choose different options, due to differences in what they have reason and reasons to value, just as two people with different effective capability sets might choose the same option. For example, Deborah, having carefully considered all her options, might have reasonably decided that she valued her family and friends above all else, and therefore decided not to go to university, but to take a job at the same call centre as her friend Christine. The issue raised by the example of Deborah and Christine concerns the nature of the background influences on their reasoning and reasons, and the extent to which those background influences are constraining or enabling. In the case of Christine, the background influences were constraining, causing her to have a smaller effective capability set than Deborah. The nature of the background influences on a person's practical reasoning is therefore of great importance from a moral point of view, since just as Sen's fasting monk is better off in a morally significant way than his starving counterpart, Deborah is better off than Christine: even if Deborah and Christine both ended up at the call centre, Deborah would have chosen this option from a wider set of valuable alternatives – she had greater effective freedom, which has intrinsic value in a life.

Figure 2 below shows an updated version of the formal notation set out in Sen 1985a (see Figure 1 above), which brings in the role of practical reasoning as an Activation Factor.

**Figure 2: An Updated Capabilities Approach**

$x \in X$	$x$ is a set of commodities and $X$ is the set of all possible commodity vectors.
$c = c(x)$	is a vector of characteristics of commodities, where
$c$	is a function that maps characteristics of commodities into the characteristics space [for example, the relevant characteristic of a bicycle is that it provides mobility];
$b=f(c(x z_i,z_e,z_s))$	is a vector of activities and states of being (functionings) where
$f \in F$	is a conversion function that maps characteristics of commodities into the space of functionings, $F$ is the set of all possible conversion functions, and
$z_i,z_e,z_s$	are conversion factors at the individual (i), social (s) and environmental (e) levels, which determine the rate of conversion from characteristics to functionings.
$OC$	is the <i>objective</i> capability set comprising all potential functionings an individual can achieve: for individual $i$ : $OC_i(X_i)= \{(b_i) \forall x_i \text{ and } \forall f_i\}$ .
$p$	is the mode of practical reasoning of the individual, which motivates the choice of potential functioning to be actualized (gives each potential functioning a probability of being selected, e.g. for Christine, the probability of choosing university was very low).
$pr \in PR$	$pr$ is an activation function that maps objective capabilities into the space of functionings in accordance with $p$ . $PR$ is the set of all possible activation functions
$EC$	Is the set of Effective Capabilities, comprising all potential functionings an individual can achieve, given her configuration of commodities and conversion factors, AND the filtering effect of her mode of practical reasoning:  $EC_i(X_i)= \{((b_i) \forall x_i \text{ and } \forall f_i)pr_i\}$  Note: applying the notation according to Nussbaum’s logic gives: $EC_i(X_i)= \{(b_i) \forall x_i \text{ and } \forall f_i \text{ and } p_i\}$

Applying the updated conceptual model to Deborah and Christine in the domain of education, we can see that the option of going to university lies in the *Objective Capability* set of both young people; it is a freedom that is available, *in principle*, to both. For Deborah, this option is fully “visible” and available – it is part of her *Effective Capability* set (her objective and effective capabilities in this domain are identical). However, due to her mode of practical reasoning, Christine’s Effective

Capability set (EC) is smaller than her Objective Capability set (OC), and also smaller than Deborah's Effective Capability set: the option of going to university falls beyond the boundary of her imagined world of possibility; this option is therefore not realistically available to her (in the absence of some kind of intervention).

More generally, when a person's objective capabilities are curtailed by practical reasoning, her effective capability set is smaller than her objective capability set ( $EC < OC$ ). If her effective capability set is larger than her objective capability set ( $EC > OC$ ), the person might be described as deluded or narcissistic. If  $EC = OC$ , the person might be said to be in sound prudential form. We might also say that she holds the virtue of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom.

This is not to say that a person should not have aspirations that extend beyond her objective capability set. On the contrary, aspirations are an important source of motivation to plan and perform actions to expand one's effective capabilities. However, when  $EC > OC$ , we might say the person has made a mistake in his practical reasoning that has led him to over-estimate or inflate his effective capability set, perhaps by attributing to himself powers that he does not have, or by misreading the external conditions. For example, a businessman of great wealth but lacking the virtues of intellect, empathy, openness and diplomacy may believe that his wealth qualifies him to be a successful and legitimate political leader. However, he is either erroneously attributing these characteristics to himself, or he has misinterpreted what the role of political leader entails.

### **3. Discussion**

This section focuses on three discussion points: (1) the connection between practical reasoning, capability and achieved well-being; (2) the relationship to the problem of adaptive preferences; and (3) some implications of my account for other theories of social justice, in particular, Rawls' ideal of Fair Equality of Opportunity.

#### **Practical reasoning and capability**

The act of choice is of central theoretical and practical importance to the CA. There is a substantial body of literature on capability and agency (e.g. Fukuda-Parr 2003; Sen 1985b), and the influence of background conditions on preferences, choices and goals (e.g. Burchardt 2009; Nussbaum 2001; Sen 1999). All of this concerns practical reasoning. However, despite it being singled out as having special status (e.g. Nussbaum 2000), there has been, to date, no detailed account of the role of practical reasoning in capability.

This paper has shown how practical reasoning can be formally and explicitly incorporated into the theoretical framework of the CA. I have proposed that practical reasoning can be conceptualised as an *activation factor* that mediates between capability and functioning. Alternatively, it can be thought of as a constituent of internal capability. This account based on a relational conceptualisation of practical reasoning and practical identity, which recognises that these are socially constructed and constituted, and located within relationships of belonging and solidarity.

The story of Deborah and Christine demonstrates that practical reasoning is an important part of what Sen calls “real opportunity”, or what might be termed true *positive freedom* (Berlin 1969). It is not external impediment or fear of punishment that prevents Christine having access to the capability of going to university, and there are no deliberate attempts to manipulate her desires. Rather, the constraining factor is what Lukes (1974, 23) calls the “mundane” processes of socialization that shape a person’s values and goals. The connection between practical reason and freedom means that the background influences that shape practical reasoning and acts of choice are of central relevance to the CA. A dynamic and socialized view of capability can accommodate the idea that background inequalities in socio-economic and cultural capital can be a source of injustice, which can result in diminished capability; that is, diminished *effective* capability.

### **Practical Reasoning and Adaptive Preferences**

The issue under discussion – I shall call it the Problem of Conditioned Reasoning - is closely related to the Problem of Adaptive Preferences. The problem of Adaptive Preferences is defined as “the adjustment of people’s aspirations to feasible possibilities” (Elster 1982, 219) or, in Sen’s (1987, 11) terms, the *disciplining of desires* in response to deprivation or oppression. The problem of Conditioned Reasoning is a subset of the wider problem of adaptive preferences. While “Adaptive Preferences” often refer to the adjustment of existing goals and desires, the problem of Conditioned Reasoning relates to background inequalities in how those goals and desires are shaped originally, and the circumstances that moulded the person’s basic mode of practical reasoning. Sen (e.g. 2003) highlights gender conditioning as a paradigmatic example of this kind of “disciplining” or oppressive influence on people’s desires and life plans. The problem of Conditioned Reasoning is therefore prior to the problem of adaption of existing preferences; it is a preliminary stage of the disciplining of desires, making it worthy of separate analysis.

The Problem of Conditioned Reasoning is relevant principally to the early stages in the life course. Youth is a formative period because it is during this stage that, through socialization and enculturation, a person develops the fundamental value commitments that will shape her life

trajectory. For young people, then, these fundamental value commitments and projects have important implications for future capability and functioning. They constitute the person's mode of practical reasoning, and are the guiding principles that underpin goals, life plans, decision-making and action (Austin 2016).

The formative years in a human life are therefore crucial in a person's "capacity to aspire" (Appadurai 2004). Background inequalities in socio-economic, human and cultural capital are likely to lead to unequal capacity for sound practical reasoning, resulting in inequalities in capability and functioning in early life stages, with potentially life-long consequences for the individual, as well as intergenerational consequences for social mobility, as the conditions of 'social discipline' are reproduced. *Sound practical reasoning* here refers to the capability to correctly identify one's objective capability set, such that effective capabilities are identical to objective capabilities. The capability for sound practical reasoning should be conceptualised not solely as a feature of an individual, for which she can be praised or blamed, but as a combined capability, which is socially embedded and subject to the influences of unchosen structural and background circumstances.

Social scientific evidence concerning external influences on practical reasoning confirms that the formative years are a particularly vulnerable life-stage. For example, Austin (2016) shows that economic crisis can lead to young people in their formative years downgrading their goals and ambitions; compared to the previous formative generation, young people socialized during the economic crisis of 2007-2010 gave increased priority to values relating to security, stability and conformity, to the detriment of the wider horizons of higher agency goals such as creativity and personal development. While the basic values developed during the formative life stage tend to persist into adulthood, it is also the case, of course, that with intervention, experience and learning, goals and ambitions change and develop. People are not always and necessarily permanently constrained by restrictive socialization. The proposal here is not that socialization is strongly deterministic. Rather, the argument is that socialization shapes the initial conditions in which a person starts out in life, and the potential for constrained practical reasoning and subjective constraints on capability is, at least, a live possibility that is worth consideration.

It is also important to note that the Problem of Conditioned Reasoning is based on the assumption that practical reasoning is developed through affiliation and socialization, and in that sense, all practical reasoning in every human being is "conditioned." The problematic aspect is not the social nature of practical reasoning, but unfair inequalities in the background conditions that constitute the socio-economic and cultural context in which a person's basic mode of practical reasoning develops.

## **Implications for the CA**

The discussion above has implications for both the theory and practice of the CA. First, it brings a new perspective to the debate about the best metric of well-being in the capability space. While a focus on functionings alone neglects the value of freedom in a human life (Sen 1985a), a focus on capabilities alone has been criticised for over-prioritising freedom at the expense of other goods and the actual quality of people's lives (e.g. Khader 2016; Reader 2006). This is recognised by Sen (1992, 51), who states that "we do, of course, need to know what is chosen from each set, and not just what the set is from which the choice is being made." He defines this intersection of functioning and capability as "refined functioning" - the measurement of achieved functionings with alternative possibilities and acts of choice taken into account (that is, (1) the vector of achieved functionings along with (2) the set from which the vector was chosen). In his later work (e.g. *The Idea of Justice*), Sen employs the related notion of "comprehensive outcomes", which are contrasted with "culmination outcomes". A comprehensive outcome includes not only the actual ("culmination") outcome, but also the processes by which it occurred, with a special focus on failures or violations of negative freedom by external agencies. Like "refined functionings", this concept encompasses a richer information set than functionings or capabilities alone.

Refined functionings are considered by some (e.g. Fleurbaey 2006) to provide the most complete informational basis for social evaluation in the capabilities space. By distinguishing between objective and effective capabilities, this paper suggests a further layer of refinement to the concept of refined functionings. A more detailed specification of the concept would include (1) the functioning vector; (2) the set from which it was chosen; and (3) the mode of practical reasoning that guided this choice, and was therefore the bridge between capability and functioning. This recognises that the set from which the functioning vector was chosen (the effective capability set) is subject to the internal influence of practical reasoning, and that a person's socially conditioned reasoning and reasons can prevent her from taking up opportunities (can prevent her from *activating capabilities*) that are, in principle, available to her.

Second, from a practical point of view, the identification of practical reasoning as a separate activation factor will help to enhance evaluations of well-being and guide the design of interventions. By distinguishing between objective and effective capabilities, human development programmes and initiatives could gain an extra level of insight into another factor that can constrain capability. Including practical reasoning as an integral and explicit part of the capability framework provides a



new perspective on human development as the enlargement of *effective* capabilities, and focuses attention on an additional stage at which interventions may be possible.

### **Implications for other theories of justice**

Finally, the account developed in this paper of the role of practical reason in capability can also help to illuminate wider issues of justice. The concept of capability is often linked to the idea of equality of opportunity (e.g. Roemer 1994). Fair equality of opportunity (Rawls 1999) is the ideal that, not only should socially advantageous positions be open to all, but that all should have “a fair chance to attain them” (Rawls 1999, 73). Fair equality of opportunity (FEO) shares many conceptual features with capability. Both FEO and capability recognise the joint importance of individual and social factors in creating not just formal opportunity, but real opportunity. Like capability, the concept of FEO is designed to provide a broad framework within which practical reasoning and agency can be well exercised.

FEO provides a foundation for upward social mobility; it requires that people with equal talent and equal ambition should have an equal chance of obtaining socially advantageous positions, regardless of their socio-economic background:

“those who are at the same level of talent and ability, and have the same willingness to use them, should have the same prospects of success, regardless of their initial place in the social system...The expectations of those with the same abilities and aspirations should not be affected by their social class.” (Rawls 1999, 73).

However, the analysis in this paper suggests that FEO does not go far enough as an ideal of social justice. While FEO recognises that both individual and social factors have a role in determining real, fair opportunity, the “ambition” clause is conceptualised in terms of a person’s “willingness” to use their talents (see Rawls quote above). This individualized conception of ambition falls short, since it fails to recognise the the processes of socialization that set the terms of a person’s horizons of ambition, and inform the kinds of goals and plans the person makes for herself.

Inequality in background social influences therefore pose a problem for FEO as set out above. During socialization, characteristics of a person that ought to be irrelevant to her life opportunities and outcomes can come to dominate the formation of her goals and ambitions. For example, gender norms within families are an important background influence in shaping social roles, beliefs, and aspirations (Okin 1991). This is apparent in persistent gender inequalities in school subject choices (Riddell 2012) and occupations (e.g. Dwyer 2013). The consequences of the background influence of gender norms on ambitions and expectations are well documented: these include negative effects

on women's material well-being (e.g. Lips 2013) and health (e.g. Borrell et al 2014). More generally, a narrow definition of ambition as a purely individual characteristic fails to recognise the social embeddedness of the person, and the ways in which norms, expectations and narratives in the private sphere of home and the public sphere of society shape practical reasoning and ambition. Fair equality of opportunity requires that two people with equal ability and equal ambition have equal chances of success. This formulation neglects unfair inequalities in cultural capital (or "horizons") due to a person's initial position in the social order. A social account of capability containing a carefully specified role for practical reasoning can solve this problem.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper offers a new account of the role of practical reasoning in capability. I have adopted a socialized conception of practical reasoning that is embedded in affiliation, developed through mechanisms of social enculturation, and subject to background inequalities relating to the social and cultural norms and practices of a person's social group, particularly during early life stages. Practical reasoning and the background influences on it are acknowledged implicitly in much capabilities scholarship; however, this paper has singled it out for explicit and separate analysis, in order to show that practical reasoning can be a subjective constraint on real freedom, and therefore that including it in evaluations in the capabilities space can add a valuable analytical dimension.

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