

# Value(s) and wealth as the ground of theoretical convergence between the contemporary approaches of well-being: a framework for a new answer to the ‘Easterlin Paradox’

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide a conceptual framework as a support of the answer to the ‘Easterlin Paradox’ based on the ‘omitted variables’ hypothesis. This framework is deduced from a theoretical appraisal of the Sen’s Capability Approach regarding its treatment of subjective theories of human well-being. It is argued that the Sen’s rejection of subjectivism *as such* is based on an incomplete restitution of it. The “deliberate incompleteness” of the CA leaves a space for a kind of subjectivism: individuals value some qualitative characteristics, personal and societal, whose changes can explain the paradox. It amounts to endorse an ‘Aspirations-Achievements Gap Model’ with regard to things and states that are valued by individuals. It makes echoes to the Gasper’s (2007) statement: “SWB (...) could reflect agency achievement, which perhaps explains some of the observed divergences between the movements of economic variables, OWB and SWB”.

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## 1. Introduction

Easterlin (1974, 1995, and 2001) and other authors have asserted that the available collected ‘happiness’ or ‘life satisfaction’ in different countries are positively correlated, in a particular year, with individual’s income but over time, the average of these responses is untrended, even sometimes is declining, in spite of a strong increase in average income levels.

The economist’s explanations rest mainly on the identification of ‘treadmills’ introducing psychological ‘relativities’ into the relation between individual’s income and reported well-being (Binswanger, 2006). An alternative explanation finds timidly some supporters: it can be a result of failing to take into account changes in relevant variables which affect people’s well-being (see, Gasper, 2007, 2005; Di Tella and McCulloch, 2005; Bruni, 2004).

It is surprising that the latter direction does not display more interest. Indeed, all the contemporary approaches of well-being share at least the following statements: (1) human well-being (HWB) is multidimensional, economic measures thereby ignoring large areas of it; (2) these measures are poor measures in the area to which they attend (Gasper, 2004). The splitting of the field regarding definitions, terminology, methodology and the resulting lack of legibility concerning the nature of HWB may explain it. Ruta et al. (2007) emphasize that ‘many researchers in these fields have been ignorant of the work of people from other disciplines’ and Comim (2005) exemplifies it with regard to the two groups of approaches that have achieved prominence in social sciences, namely the Sen’s Capability Approach (CA) and the Subjective Well-Being approach (SWB). The diversity of approaches, each one growing on epistemological and conceptual foundations often built against the others, has meant that little progress have been made toward “a widely accepted general theory of the nature of quality of life, and its relationships to known and hypothesised causal determinants” (Ruta et al., 2007).

The purpose of this paper is to suggest some news and strengthen some existing ways of bridging the gap between approaches of individual well-being in order to draw a consistent conceptual framework supporting the ‘omitted variables’ hypothesis. There are ongoing efforts in this regard; the idea being that such approach could help to overcome the analytical ‘silences’ of such other. The idea is in the air and this article aims at describing the theoretical implications of such a stance. So, it does not provide a survey of contemporary approaches of human well-being (see, Gasper, 2004). To achieve its ambition, it will refer, in fits and starts, to those which structure the academic ‘scenery’, especially in philosophical literature.

The pivot of our work is the CA's aim to tackle the nature of HWB with a kind of flexible objectivism as a mediator between what Sen call the 'utility' and the 'resources' spaces. It is argued that his rejection of subjectivism as such is based on a biased restitution of it. This plus the CA's "deliberate incompleteness" permit it (or imperil it; it all depends) to consider a subjective approach as a leading step toward its reconciliation with practical appraisal.

It remains consequently to lay out the foundations and to delimit the scope of this subjective approach. This task requires questioning the notion of *value*, understood as the facts for people of according importance or interest to things or states and of becoming motivated to engage in them. It is argued that in the Sen's CA, this notion is still surrounded with analytical fuzziness. Nevertheless, Sen's CA seems to provide on that matter some indications which are susceptible of being the cornerstones of an approach that Sen himself had considered: "a richer descriptive account of a person's well-being" and "a wider class of interesting moralities that utilitarianism and—more generally—welfarism permit" are possible with a *plural and vectorial view of utility* (Sen, 1980-1, p. 193).

At this point stand the ground of theoretical convergence enabling a conceptual articulation based on the following reasoning: individuals value states or conditions, personal and societal, in reference to values, whose changes can explain the apparent paradox. It echoes the Gasper's assertion: "SWB (...) could reflect agency achievement, which perhaps explains some of the observed divergences between the movements of economic variables, OWB and SWB" (Gasper, 2007). We argue that this stance amounts to endorse, somewhat akin to the Ruta et al's work (2007), an '*Aspirations-Achievement Gap Model*' with regard to *states or conditions valued by individuals* in the context of their evaluations of their lives.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 briefly reviews the Sen's CA and insists on its "deliberate incompleteness". Section 3 provides a critical analysis of Sen's charges against subjectivism. Section 4 delineates the theoretical structure of a general model of individual well-being based on the concepts of value(s) and interest. Section 5 indicates how it can support an alternative explanation to the 'Easterlin Paradox'. Section 6 concludes.

## **2. The Sen's Capability Approach and its "deliberate incompleteness"**

### *2.1. The Sen's CA as a mediate account between 'extremes'*

Sen's Capability Approach arose from his rejection of two rival theories which aim at giving a clear informational basis for well-being. On one hand he rejects utilitarianism because it rests on self-perceived appraisal of one's situation. On the other hand, he cannot accept equalizing welfare with resources possession because it ignores the many contingencies which affect the conversion of goods and services into welfare. As Sumner writes it, 'commodities are too external to our lives, too merely instrumental, to be determinative of well-being' (Sumner, 1996, p. 61).

Sen's rejection of utilitarianism takes different forms. Firstly, utilitarianism can be factored into three components (Sen, 1985b): (i) consequentialism, when the goodness of an act is given by the goodness of its consequences on the state of affairs, (ii) welfarism, when the goodness of a state of affairs is given by the goodness of the utility regarding that state and (iii) sum-ranking, when the goodness of a state of affairs is given by the total sum of utilities of involved agents. His critiques refer mainly to welfarism and sum-ranking. According to him, welfarism neglects information which can be important for the whole society, taking into account only utility-based information would deny the intrinsic importance of civil and political rights or positive freedom (Sen, 1982).

Secondly, Sen defines utilitarianism either as a happiness or pleasure theory, as a desire-fulfilment theory or as a choice theory (Sen, 1985a). According to him, (Sen, 1985b, pp. 188-189) "as a mental-state concept, the perspective of happiness may give a very limited view of

other mental activities. There are mental states, other than being just happy, such as stimulation excitements, etc., which are of *direct relevance to a person's well-being* [...]. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that although happiness is of obvious and direct relevance to well-being, it is inadequate as a representation of well-being". The problem with a desire approach seems to lie on the interpersonal incomparable view of utility. Thus, it appears difficult to compare information about desire when one's desires differ from others'. Utility cannot then be measured by direct observation of objects of desire. The problem is, then, to understand if, as Sen (1985a) quotes it, 'I value  $x$ , and so I desire it' or if 'I desire  $x$ , and so I value it'. The utilitarian approach to well-being seems to corroborate the latter proposition, that is to say, I value one state of affairs because it fulfils my desires. This conception of well-being seems to ignore the act of desiring as a valuable one. For Sen, desiring  $x$  it is giving some value to it. Finally, Sen's rejection of utility as a moral theory of well-being relies on a neglect of the choice aspect of utility because it represents an over simplification of human behaviour (Comin and Bagolin, 2006). Sen (1985a, pp. 12-13) argues that utility is viewed 'as nothing other than the real-valued representation of choice. If a person's 'choice function' has certain characteristics of internal consistency, then the person's choice function can be represented by one binary relation and all the choices can be seen as maximisation [of utility] according to that binary relation'. But as Sen adds, the person's state of well-being depends on the motivations that underlie choice. It is not the act of choice which gives values to well-being but the motivations under the act of choice. "To assume that the binary relation underlying choice must be the person's ordering of well-being is an heroic simplification" Sen (1985a, p. 13) concludes about the choice approach.

To conclude, according to Sen the utility-based approach to well-being cannot represent correctly this idea of well-being because it overemphasis on mental states as hedonistic personal feelings of well-being.

If Sen rejects welfarism because of its lack of objectivity to define well-being, he also rejects resourcism because it goes too far in objectivity.

Sen (1999) recognizes that John Rawls' Theory of Justice influenced his own work, specially his criticism of utilitarianism. But he remains critics about his theory of justice based on a fair distribution of primary goods. According to Sen (1985b), the Rawls' defence of primary goods as the adequate informational basis for normative evaluations confuses the means and ends of well-being. For Rawls (1971), a society must fairly distribute primary goods among citizens. Rawls considers primary goods as resources that one must dispose to live a rational life. But as Sen replies, Rawls ignores the distinction between means (the primary goods) and ends (the real valued achievements that one can realize) of a flavourishing human life. As he points out (Sen, 1999, pp.72-73) "the broadening of the informational focus from incomes to primary goods is not, however, adequate to deal with all the relevant variations in the relationships between income and resources, on the one hand and well-being and freedom, on the other. Indeed, primary goods themselves are mainly various types of general resources, and the use of these resources to generate the ability to do valuable things is subject to as much the same list of variations we considered in the context of relationship between income and well-being". In other words, the problem seems to rely on the distinction between the means (all the resources one has) and the ends of well-being (what one can achieve with his resources). According to Sen, two individuals with the same amount of resources (income or primary goods) could achieve two different states of well-being, being given their own characteristics. That is why it is important not to consider only the effective amount of resources but what an individual is able to reach with these resources. If people differs from one and another it is because they do not have exactly the same characteristics, that is to say, they do not convert a same bundle of resources into the same level of well-being. Each of us has specific conversion factors depending on personal features, social and

political environmental factors, social norms and institutions (Robeyns, 2005). Being aware of the goods a person owns is not sufficient to know what she can achieved in terms of well-being. It is then necessary to study the circumstances of how a same bundle of resources can conduct to different levels of well-being.

## 2.2. The “deliberate incompleteness” or the refusal to tackle the issue of the nature of HWB

Sen has concentrated most of his efforts to discredit rival approaches to justify his own conceptually and philosophically. It remains that the Sen’s CA has been, in various aspects, self-consciously lightly specified (see, Gasper, 2002).

The most controversial aspect is certainly the “deliberate incompleteness” of the CA in providing a comprehensive theory of valuation, e.g. the means for defining the space of functionings or capabilities for well-being assessments. Sen (1993, p. 32) asserts that “the need for selection and discrimination is neither an embarrassment, nor a unique difficulty, for the conceptualization of functioning and capability”. The apparent comfort of Sen contrasts with the uneasiness of his close associates (Clark, 2005; Alkire, 2002a, 2002b; Nussbaum, 2000; Qizilbash, 1998).<sup>1</sup>

Sen (*op. cit.*) recognizes that “there is no escape from the problem of evaluation in selecting a class of functionings in the description and appraisal of capabilities”. He is quite firm, however, in arguing that the “incompleteness” must be seen as a strength. He stresses many arguments in this direction, in response to Nussbaum’s ‘pressure’ to draw the approach toward the objectivist-universalist flank.<sup>2</sup> For example, he wants to avoid the charge of paternalism by leaving each person with the freedom to define his/her set of functionings (Clark, 2005, p. 1346). He also argues that “there is a positive value in an incomplete theory which is consistent and combinable with different substantive theories and which may be filled in by reasoned public debate, itself a valuable process” (Sen, 1993, p. 47).<sup>3</sup>

Analytically speaking, however, the matter cannot be left at that point. For such an ambitious approach, the issue of the explanation of “what it is that makes [a] prudential goods prudentially good and how this something produces individual well-being” (Varelius, 2004, p. 76) seems inescapable. A theory of well-being must offer, not only a list of “goods”, but also and above all an account of “what qualifies something to appear on that list” (Sumner, 1996, p. 16). That amounts to tackle the question of the very nature of HWB. In the CA’s context, it is question to establish the criterion for inclusion of such functionings in the evaluative space.

In connection with that, Sen (1993, p. 31) argues: “The identification of certain ‘doings’ and ‘beings’ as objects of value is itself a *valuational exercise*. The list of functionings reflects a view of what is valuable and what is of no intrinsic value (though possibly quite useful in the pursuit of other things of value)”. Sumner (1996, p. 63) rightly asks “whose view?” Sen answers that when it is about social well-being the space must be defined by social standards reflecting shared values; and when it is about a person, he promotes “self-evaluation” of his or her “*own living standards*” (Sen, 1987a, p. 41-42). Seen in this light, individual well-being would consist in accomplishment regarding conditions or states that *one values*. Sen insists on the cognitive and reflective content of the “valuational exercise” in this regard (see below). But in all cases, it does not prevent it from having *fundamentally a subjective character*.

This conclusion is striking in relation to an approach mainly built against, a priori, any subjective interpretation of well-being. It seems then, that Sen’s charges against subjectivism as such should be reconsidered. Before that, let us return to the issue of the nature of HWB. Sen (1993, p. 36) affirms that “in [the CA], functionings are seen as central to the *nature* of well-being, even though the *sources* of well-being could easily be external to the person”. Sen thus ‘equates’ the functionings valued with the nature of HWB. This stance is coherent with his critique of ‘resourcism’ which, according to him, conflates the means with the ends. The

commodities are external to the functionings being equated with the ends. Precisely, the question is to know if the last ‘equation’ is analytically defensible. As Sumner (2006) argues, any list of functionings does not literally *constitute* well-being and to defend the opposite view, that is to take a risk of conflating it with its sources because nothing responds to the issue of what it is for a condition to be intrinsically beneficial for a person.

In a widely reproduced scheme, Sen (1985a) describes a logical chain starting from a commodity, represented by its characteristics, then by the functionings being able to be achieved with it, and ending with “utility, happiness or desire-fulfilment”. Clark (2005, p.1345) stresses that “Sen has remarkably little to say about the role of utility (and its bearing on well-being)” in this schemes. Indeed, he simply notes that a functioning “has to be distinguished from” and “must not be identified with the happiness generated by the act” (Sen, 1985a, p.10). It has already been noted that this kind of scheme as his examples of “intrinsically valuable [basic] ends” serve mainly to justify his critique of utility and resource-based accounts of well-being and “do not provide a comprehensive overview of well-being” (Clark, 2005, p. 1347).

Our position is that the CA has prohibited itself of this task by its refusal to concretely tackle the ‘nature’ issue. Sen (1987a, p. 11) affirms: “Can we possibly believe that [a person] is doing well just because he is happy and satisfied? (...) The standard of living cannot be so detached from the nature of the life the person leads.” The Sen’s CA, from a logical viewpoint, is at crossroads, and this crossroads is about the nature of HWB.<sup>4</sup> The two general categories of ‘route’ are in germ in this quotation: (i) either it consists in a subjectivist-relativist one, thereby referring HWB to achievement in the ‘beings’ and ‘doings’ that a person value; (ii) or it consists in objectivist-universalist one, hence referring HWB to a list of things and activities that its defender consider to be good for a person, without necessary connection between them and a pro-attitude of his part (let us be quiet, at this stage, about the fact that a list make a theory only if it is accompanied by the ‘epistemological key’ of its constitution).

The indecision reflects itself on (or may be the root of) the dualist model – well-being plus agency (see Wells, 2006). “The primary feature of a person’s well-being is the functioning vector he or she achieves. The functioning vectors can be ranked and partially ordered in line with some common valuations” (Sen, 1985b, p. 198). That is, well-being is an objective matter whose achievement can be largely pre-specified. In contrast, agency “cannot be examined in terms of any pre-specified objective” (*ibid*, p. 204). The latter is subjectively defined in reference to “his [agent] own values and objectives” (Sen, 1999, p. 19). Nevertheless, he argues about functionings that “the focus has to be related to the underlying concerns and values, in terms of which some definable functionings may be important and others quite trivial and negligible” (Sen, 1993, p. 32). Why limiting the “underlying concerns and values” to the ‘weighing problem’ and not to functionings determination? Epistemologically speaking, Sen’s notion of well-being seems to be a matter of ‘self-evidence’ about what is good or valuable (see Varelius, 2004) (“obvious reasons”) whereas agency is a matter of the self and his values.

Elsewhere in “Capability and Well-Being”, Sen states (in reference to Nussbaum’s stance):

“I accept that this would indeed be a systematic way of eliminating the incompleteness of the capability approach. I certainly have no great objection to anyone going on that route. My difficulty with accepting that as the only route on which to travel arises (...) also from my inclination to argue about the nature and importance of the type of objectivity involved in this approach. But mostly my intransigence arises, in fact, from the consideration that the use of the capability approach as such does not require taking that route, and the deliberate incompleteness of the capability approach permits other routes to be taken which also have some plausibility” (Sen, 1993, p. 47).

No wonder then that Ruta et al. (2007) argue that “Defining quality of life as the gap between capability expectations and reality, subjectively evaluated by the person living that life, would appear (...) to constitute the kind of plausible use of the [CA] to which Sen refers”.

### 3. A critical analysis of Sen's charges against subjectivism

#### 3.1. "Pleasures (happiness), desires": a hollow victory against subjectivism

As pointed out earlier, the overall CA's rejection of subjective well-being is grounded the critique of the "three most common interpretations of utility" in the philosophical tradition and in normative economics. The crucial issue is to know if this critique exhausts all kind of well-founded subjective welfarism, even regarding the rationale of the CA.

To respond, let us just focus on the "pleasure (happiness)" and "desire-fulfilment" interpretations. In *The Standard of Living* (1987), Sen has presented a comprehensive enough view of his grief towards them as well as the tools for our reasoning.

Concerning the "view of utility as pleasure", Sen (1987a, p. 11) begins by stating its normative status: "[a] parts of utilitarian tradition (...) assume[s] that anything that is valued must be, for that reason, a generator of pleasure, and the extent of pleasure will reflect well the strength of the valuation". Having never himself provided a systematic description of that tradition (see Benicourt, 2002), let us add that the target here is Classical Hedonism.

Two points are central both to his critique and to our purpose. First, "pleasure" and "happiness" are identified. It may be asserted that he just follows the hedonists' core message. But the matter is not so simple. This theory was indeed the product of three distinct theses (Sumner, 1996, p. 91): (1) *welfare is identical to happiness*; (2) happiness consists of pleasure and the absence of pain; (3) pleasures and pains are each a class of introspectively discriminable experiences. In fact, the Sen's stance seems to retain just the two last theses for making of happiness just the class of introspectively discriminable experiences; a "mental-state concept" (Sen, 1985b, p. 188). This stance permits him to assert that "It is quite easy to be persuaded that being happy is an achievement that is valuable and that in evaluating the standard of living is an object of value" (Sen, 1987a, p. 11-12).

He observes that it is "possible to pack more into the notion of happiness than common usage will allow, and to see some objective achievements as part of being 'really happy'." We will discuss later of the "common usage" of the notion of happiness. He says that "this extension might well-form a sensible exercise" and "has a certain amount of general intellectual interest" by briefly referring to the "Greek concept of *eudaimonia*" and the "broad interpretations of happiness or pleasure" that it suggest (*ibid*, p. 12-13). However, such "enrichment" seems to him typical of the stickiness and the lack of 'conceptual freedom' of utilitarian. Further, "other notions of value and valuation can be entertained in their own right", so "there are many others avenues that are explorable" (*op. cit.*).

The valuation point is essential in the Sen's critique: "valuation is a reflective exercise with a complex and unstraightforward linkage with pleasure" and "Having pleasure or being happy is not a valuational activity as such, nor tightly tied to valuational activities" (*ibid*, p. 12-13). He introduces here a crucial distinction between "mental activities" and "basic mental states" (see Sen, 1985b). He asserts that there are "obvious connections between valuational activities and mental states of happiness" but "they cannot be identified with each other", nor "can one serve as a surrogate for the other" (*op. cit.*). At this stage, a deepening of these connections and of the characteristics of the "valuational exercise" would have been welcomed. The latter undoubtedly refers to "what a person does or does not value" (*ibid*, p. 15-16).

The critique of the desire-interpretation of utility as a "valuation method" brings some enlightments. He states that "Desiring may link closely with valuation, but it is not in itself a valuational activity. It is a plausible and *frequent consequence* of valuation, but desiring and valuing are not the same thing" (*ibid*, p. 14). This stance make echoes to an argument developed by Scanlon (1993, p. 191-192) that is of great importance here. The latter declares that "desire theories should also be rejected as accounts of well-being appropriate to the first-person point of view". He argues that "the fact that a certain outcome would fulfil a person's

desire would be a *basic reason* for that person to want that thing to come about. But desires do not provide basic reasons of this sort, at least not in non-trivial cases". For him, "the end" sought is either one of the sort described by a mental state view, or a "reason based on *some other notion of substantive good*" (emphasis added). The latter can, for instance, "reflects my judgment that a state of affairs is morally good, or that it is in my overall interest".

The point here is that an outcome is desired after a connection between this outcome with a person's need or interest, and that is the substance of a "valuational exercise". Therefore, ontologically speaking, the nature of welfare, from the person point of view, cannot be matched with the desire-fulfilment approach, but must be referred to the person's motivations, goals and standards raised in reference to values. To be short at this stage, let us provide the characterisation of the "values" notion offered by Braithwaite and Scott (1991, p. 661):

"The study of values is central to and involves the intersection of interests of philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists [and economists!]. Values are presumed to encapsulate the aspirations of individuals and of societies: They pertain to what is desirable, to deeply engrained standards that determine future directions and justify past actions".

There seems to have a striking aspect in Sen's standpoint contained in *The Standard of living*: he aims at 'destroying' confidence in the two main subjective theories not at all on argument eventually grounded in the objectivist flank, but *by opposing a kind of subjectivism*. Nevertheless, the "valuational exercise" remains fuzzy in terms of its content and, in turn, of its substantive role in the CA. This exercise is, however, the cornerstone of the identification of "aspects of life" which, in turn, establish the "objects of value" for assessing HWB.

He asks: "Is the relevant valuation function that of *the person* whose standard of living is being assessed, or is it some general valuation function reflecting accepted "standards" (e.g. those widely shared in the society)?" He calls the first approach "self-evaluation" and the second "standard-evaluation" (Sen, 1987a, p. 40-41).

Concerning the second one, he asserts that its use has both "subjective and objectives features" even if it "might appear to be largely subjective in the sense that the building blocks of judgment are the opinions held in that community". For him, a deeper analysis would require "to go into the question as to *why* these opinions are held and these values cherished" (ibid, p. 43).

Regarding "self-evaluation", Sen urges us to not confusing it with the "*utility* of the person in any of its interpretations of pleasure, or desire-fulfilment, or choice". This approach is described as being "quintessentially an *evaluative* exercise", which none of these interpretations in itself is (*op. cit.*). Referring to the 'paternalism' issue, Sen argues that it must not be related to the rejection of utility-based approach "in the form of happiness or desire or choice", but fundamentally to the "*rejection of the person's self-evaluation*", because the person's self-evaluation may "involve differences from his own utility rankings understood in these forms" (*op. cit.*, emphasis added). "Self-evaluation" seems praised in the extent that it is not identified with the 'basic mental states' account, and paternalism grief is given with relevance in the case of its rejection as such.

One of the "many avenues" to which Sen refers has undoubtedly its entry at this point, but his repeated rejection of subjectivism, in fact of subjective discrete mental states, and his insistence on the "social conditioning" issue have achieved to make of this one a 'no entry'. Although he places a great deal of objective concerns, his underlying theory about the nature of welfare still comes out looking very subjective. Hence, the analytical silences persist around the following terminology (see, Gasper, 2007): "quality of life [has] to be assessed in terms of the capability to achieve *valuable* functionings" (Sen, 1993, p. 31); "that one has *reason to value*" (Sen, 1999, p. 13). Is the reflective 'valuation exercise' an *informed* one and not simply assertion of whatever one currently value? In this case, how to avoid the paternalism critique?

Seen in this light, the proclaimed victory of the CA against subjectivism and welfarism is relevant only in reference to what it can be considered as crude and simplistic view of these, at least as accounts of the nature of well-being.

### 3.2. *Happiness, utility, value(s), functionings*

The air having been relatively cleared of some easy motives for exclusion of subjectivism as such, now is the time to try to fill in the blanks of the “self-evaluation”. It is argued that, in this perspective, notions of utility and happiness must be first reconsidered.

Having been stated that the “self-evaluation” approach must not be equated with the valuation method consisting in utility as pleasure and desire-fulfilment, is it possible to conceptualize it without any reference to utility, the latter posed as a general analytical category inherent to any personal valuation process?

The article “Plural Utility” (1980-1) appears to be a deviation regarding the CA’s development path. In the latter, Sen is concerned with the advantages of seeing “utility primarily as a vector (with several distinct components)”. These refer for him to the possibility of: (1) drawing a “richer descriptive account of person’s well-being”; (2) getting a “wider class of interesting moralities than utilitarianism and—more generally—welfarism permit” (Sen, 1980-1, p. 193). Hence, the plural and vectorial view of utility has advantages both from the *descriptive adequacy* and the moral theory points of view. Note that for him the vector view can be applied either to the set of *alternatives interpretations* of utility, or within one interpretation. Near the end of the article, Sen provides an interesting typology:

“A morality that holds that the goodness of any state of affairs is a function (strictly speaking, an increasing function) of the collection (strictly, an n-tuple) of utility vectors of all the persons involved, may be called a utility-supported morality. This a wide very class, of which welfarism is a subclass, of which utilitarianism is a member.” (ibid, p. 207-208).

Recall now the Sen’s definition of welfarism: “Welfarism is a more general requirement [vis-à-vis Utilitarianism] which makes the goodness of any state a function (...) of the vector of total utilities in that state.” (ibid, p. 207). There is something disconcerting in the sense that it seems not to exist, logically, any distance between “utility-supported” and “welfarism-supported” moralities. If we were right, the definition is welfarism is problematic and Sumner (2006) gives us the means to reveal it. Etymologically the word welfare means ‘the conditions of faring or doing well’. In turn, “welfarism”, strictly speaking, is a general requirement which makes the goodness of any state a function of the welfare of individuals. If the latter is assessed from the subject’s point of view, so it’s a *subjective welfarism*: it depends on the achievements concerning conditions (call them functionings) that the person value in reference to his values, so he considers them as conditions that enrich his life.

Analytically speaking, the ‘utility’ category can stand here: the connection between things, events, or activities and the person’s interests corresponding to his valued functionings is the basis for them having a new *quality* for him: their usefulness. Recall the Scanlon’s argument (now completed): an outcome is desired not for its own sake but for our own and when it does, reasons are either pleasure/enjoyment-seeking, or else *it meets goals, standards, concerns raised in reference to his values* (see Anderson, 1993). Hence, Scanlon as well as Sen rightly affirms that Hedonism and Desire-fulfilment theories are unsuitable as accounts of well-being from the first-person point of view. Knowing pleasurable/enjoyable experiences constitute certainly a valuable functionings. From a subjectivist view, the things or states which are desired because they are acknowledged as meeting the achievement aim regarding others functionings. In the latter context, it always exist a positive psychological emotions or mental states (satisfaction, gratification, excitement, etc.) but it can be considered as a correlate manifesting this ‘meeting’, not as the final aim: what count, in terms of welfare, is



not the positive psychological emotions but primarily the experience of the conditions of the person's life.

From this point of view, the Clark's difficulties with the utility notion can be resolved. He first asserts:

"(...) despite having recognised that utility has intrinsic value of its own, Sen devotes little attention to the realisation of this 'momentous' functioning in his accounts of well-being". (...) Utility barely gets mentioned, and when it does the implications for personal well-being are not spelt out. (...) Nor does he acknowledge that these achievements make a separate and distinct contribution to quality of life". (Clark, 2005, p. 1358).

In the corresponding footnote, he writes:

"By this I do not mean to imply that utility is generated independently of other functionings. The point is that whatever utility flows from a set of functionings makes an intrinsically valuable contribution to a person's well-being. In Table 1 I have recorded utility as a separate characteristic (and functioning) for each item. This is because utility is inextricably bound up with most (if not all) doings and beings: it is impossible to specify the precise nature of the relationship between each functioning and utility, which depends upon personal circumstances and typically varies between people and over time. For example, while I may derive a good deal of pleasure from cycling through the streets of Cambridge in my free time, the migrant labourer, who is compelled to cycle long distances to work every day, may derive a considerable degree of dis-utility from riding his bicycle." (*ibid*, p. 1366).

It appears immediately that in this reasoning utility is equated with pleasure derived from things or activities. But before any *use*, by connecting the thing or the state to one of his concerns, a person decide that it *have a value for him*, and that is the essence of the utility notion. Pleasure or any other mental states can be either the aim (as a valued functionings), or a correlate 'proof' of the quality of utility.

The CA's treatment of the happiness notion also introduces some ambiguities from the subjectivist point of view. By identifying happiness with pleasure, he refers it to the state of being or feeling happy with or about something, hence to a discrete episode completed by an intentional object. He justifies that by the "common usage" argument. This stance is contentious. In everyday language as well as in philosophical literature there are several notions available as the matrix for evaluating how well a life is going for the person who is living it, including, for example, welfare, life satisfaction and *happiness*. It is true that none of these concepts, amongst others, have been given with accepted meanings and that the exact relationships between them, in general, remain unclear (see Gasper, 2004).

Nevertheless, the recasting of happiness as the matricial concept into a general framework of subjective evaluation of the conditions of one's life seems itself common and is 'in the air' around the CA. In discussing the potential synergies between the CA and the SWB approach, Comim (2005, p. 166) asserts that "the most difficult hurdle for bringing together these two approaches would seem to consist in the CA's critique of subjective well-being in its many different forms". He stresses then that this general critique is accompanied by a more specific critique if happiness as being "basically a mental state" and not "necessarily the product of a critical reflection". Further he asks about the way of "operat[ing] within a multiplicity of informational spaces when analysing HWB" and of "structur[ing] those spaces in order to produce a coherent account". He suggests then a beginning answer by referring to Rawls' discussion of happiness. Indeed, Rawls (1971, p. 548-555) distinguishes between two aspects of happiness: (1) "the execution of a rational plan" which include many final aims; (2) "the state of mind". He emphasises then that "subjectively" happiness can defined by the successful execution of that plan. He also notes that "happiness is not one aim among others that we aspire to, but the fulfilment of the whole design itself". In this way, Rawls puts forward an inclusive view of happiness, closely associated with the pursuit of autonomy and realisation of one's life plans. Comim (2005, p. 168) adds thereby: "Somehow, *the previous dichotomy between features of the CA and the SWB appears to lose relevance in the face of the possibility of defining happiness as 'an inclusive end'*. (...) So, happiness cannot be a dominant end of human action in itself, but can be identified with a plurality of aims". It is

unfortunate for us that these remarks had not been the cornerstone of the Comim's subsequent researches of "similarities and potential synergies", all the more that he states that "both [approaches] share a similar general objective, namely, an investigation of HWB and *people's evaluations of their lives*" (*op. cit.*, emphasis added).

This reasoning is largely akin to the Ruta et al's (2007) one when they argue that "others interpretations of utility are possible". They refer also to Aristotle to argue that the meaning of happiness can be extended well beyond the "commonly understood" one as the fundamental motivation to pursue positive mental states. "Eudaimonia" as a goal can be achieved "in a number of ways, for example (...), living according to one's values".

Beyond the CA's sphere of influence, this kind of interpretation is relatively devoid of any controversial aspect. Sumner (1996, p. 139) argues, for example, that "Although there is a sizeable philosophical literature on the nature of happiness (...), few believe that it consists either in pleasure and the absence of pain or in the satisfaction of informed desire. (...) About the only thing everyone agrees on is that happiness is a complex and a multi-faceted notion". He argues elsewhere that "the idea that welfare is identical to, or consists in, happiness should be attractive to any subjectivist" (*ibid*, p. 111). He also urges us to distinguish between "feeling happy" as an occurrent episode of life and "being authentically happy" (*ibid*, p. 142-147). In the latter sense, being happy for a person means having a certain kind of positive attitude toward his/her life, which in its fullest form has both a cognitive and an affective component. The cognitive aspect of happiness consists in a positive evaluation of the conditions of his/her life, a judgement that, at least on balance, it measures up favourably *against his/her standards, goals or expectations*. The affective side of happiness, as Sumner (1996, p. 146) declares, consists in what we commonly call a sense of well-being: the person finds his/her life enriching or rewarding, or feeling fulfilled by it.

Giri (2000, p. 1007) asserts that a "foundational critique of utilitarianism requires a critique of the equation of seeking for pleasure with attainment of happiness" and that Sen does not do this. He argues that it "is possible to have a view of happiness which transcends the limits of pleasure-seeking in itself" and praises the Sumner's agenda regarding it: the settled person's view of his/her level of life satisfaction can be thought as representing the striving for happiness, not as the running after momentary pleasure alone, but after "equanimity in life which enables one not to lose one's peace of mind" (*op. cit.*).

Let us make at this stage a short summary. At the bottom level, the utility notion has been briefly questioned to assert that in a general acceptance, it should refer to the connection between a thing, an activity, a state or an event and one's expectations, goals, standards, concerns or interests. At the upper level, the happiness notion has also been questioned to recast it as the conceptual and analytical matrix of a "self-evaluation" framework. The fundamental structure of a theoretical model of "self-evaluation" is thus shaped.

The next part will be devoted to deal with additional theoretical implications. Before that, we have to briefly discuss the remaining Sen's grieves to any subjectivist approach of well-being: (1) the exclusion of "non-utility information"; (2) the "social conditioning" issue. These have undoubtedly a great relevance but the question is if, in themselves, they must conduct to rejection or else if their treatment requires the intervention of different but complementary levels of analysis than the subject alone.

Generally, these two critiques are mentioned in reference to cases in which rights, freedoms, and privations would be consequently 'transparent' into normative judgments.

Two categories of comments can come out here. The first one derives from the proposed alternative interpretation of utility. It can be sensibly hypothesized that the kind of rights and freedoms that we have commonly in mind are utilities for individuals; that they form part of the things and activities which individuals connect to some of their standards or expectations which, in turn, constitutes, from their point of view, the conditions of an enriching life.

Understood as Sen commonly reports, utility could probably not have this bearing. In this line, the Ruta et al.'s (2007) observation is highlighting: "Utility as the pursuit of happiness could therefore, under an alternative interpretation of happiness, be conceived to include some of Sen's 'non-utility' attributes of well-being". Moreover, recent empirical research on SWB has indicated that various rights and freedoms is a strong determinant of the variations of average levels between countries (see Veenhoven, 2006; Frey and Stutzer, 2002).

The second one precisely derives from cases where these rights or freedoms would be violated without any repercussion on the expressed level of life satisfaction. In those cases, we are inclined to think that there are necessities for establishing a transdisciplinary dialogue rather than rejecting "self-evaluation". To be short, flagrant cases of deprivations in terms of rights, freedoms, and basic needs going along with high level of life satisfaction must become objects of deepened studies both around *the social construction of individual values* and the relationships of dominations within and between social groups. In any cases, the frame of "self-evaluation" of welfare cannot be rejected without taking the risk of losing relevance in terms of descriptive adequacy in assessing the conditions which enrich individual's life.

To extend the point, having placed the pivot of the "self-evaluation" at the level of the person's goals, standards or expectations, it does not prevent the analysis from, at least, posing the question of their social institution as well as toward the values that are subjacent (see below). Wells (2006) points out that the CA lacks of formal basis on this matter: the (cultural) values underlying the expectations' or objectives' formation are neglected, even rejected of the framework. Gore (1997, p. 245-247) argues, in reference to the well-being plus agency model, that "it is questionable to sever any human activity, however closely related to basic physiological needs, from social meanings": "particular activities are constituted through the existence of social forms which give them their meaning and character, and these activities at the same time modify and re-constitute the social forms". He adds:

"Confining attention to utilities is a highly limited way of seeing people' [Sen 1984, 512]. But judging well-being in terms of disembodied functionings is *equally* 'a highly limited way of seeing people'. It is necessary to move a step further and recognize the embeddedness of intentional and reflective activity within given, but changing, institutional contexts as intrinsically important for well-being" (*ibid*, p. 246).

In construing his idea of practical reasoning, Sen (2000, p. 486) argues that the respective position of the agent be taken into account: "In contrast with impositionality, position-relative impersonality requires, to put it in mildly mathematical terms, that parametric note be taken of the respective positions of the different persons, but not of the exact personal *identities* involved". As Wells (2006, p. 8) puts it, that amounts to say that one cannot reason from nowhere, but "exactly where one does reason from doesn't seem to count". According us, the *sociologisation of the subjectivity* should be preferred to its hypothetical 'mathematisation'.

#### **4. Value(s), wealth and interest: an 'Aspirations-Achievement Gap' Model**

##### *4.1. Retaking the "road of values" in economics*

It is common within the literature on HWB to stigmatise the normative economics' position and the underlying utilitarian doctrine rightly qualified as being the spontaneous philosophy of the standard economist. The picture of the human actor – *homoeconomicus* – is usually depicted by the employment of a specific rationality and a concentration on his self-interest.

A scarcely noticed controversy in the history of economic thought can be seen as one of the most significant epistemological foundation of the standard stance. This controversy refers to the definition of *wealth* and its linkages with market categories which was inherent to the main field of inquiry of the 19th-century political economy – the theory of exchange value.

The crossroad on that matter was the 'Ricardo-Say' controversy (see Berr and Douai, 2007; Gehrke and Kurz, 2001). The core of the latter has laid out two routes.

Ricardo, by founding his conceptual system on the Aristotelian (and Smithian) distinction between use-value (utility) and exchange value (price), has established the irreducibility of wealth – as the set of use-values – to market categories. Just by emphasizing that for a thing to have an ‘economic value’ it is necessary but it does not suffice that some individuals value (have interest toward) this thing, his framework leave a space for thinking an enlarged conception of individual and social wealth which stand by its etymological sense: *the conditions of well-being*. The fact that he say nothing more on utility than the capacity of things to respond to the “necessaries, conveniences and enjoyments of human life” (Ricardo, 1970, p. 225), was not a theoretical thinness, as it is commonly asserted. It was by theoretical consistency. Ricardo (and Marx, see below) has never said this but we do not falsify his thought by asserting that utility, referring to the human valuing process, was a matter of anthropology, sociology, etc., not of mathematics and of political economy as he saw it.

Say has taken the other road by his rejection of the distinction between use-value and price. For him, there is only one value, the price. It is “by giving it utility that [a thing] hadn’t that we give it value” and “it is by increasing the degree of utility which was located when we acquire them that we increase their value” (Say, 1996, p. 314-315). Thus, “price is the measure of value of things, and their value is the measure of their utility” (Say, 1972, p. 39) and “*Exchangeable value and riches are synonymous*” (Say in Ricardo, 1970, p. 231). It is outside the scope of the paper to develop that but the following point is fundamental. Against the early inconsistencies quoted by Ricardo, Say has taken some paths of reasoning with which he never managed to clarify them: he never overcame the contradiction which consists in simultaneously asserting that exchange value rest entirely on utility – thus treated as a quantity – and that ‘natural riches’ (all things that have utility for individuals apart from market values) have no exchange value. Nevertheless, these paths contributed to shunting the car of economics away from the classical on to a different track which was to lead to marginalist theory and to the foundations of welfare economics (see Béraud, 2004).

On “our matter”, the Say-Jevons affiliation is of great importance. The latter states:

“There exist many useful things which cannot be transmitted from a person to another (...). Also, it is in reality impossible to buy or to sell the love of parents, the esteem of friends, the happiness of a peace of mind. Wealth can make a lot of things, but it cannot ensure these goods more precious than pearls and rubies. (...) Political economy does not pretend to examine all the causes of happiness and these moral riches, which can neither be bought nor paid, do not form part of wealth in the way that we will understand it. (...) If wealth is far from being the only good thing, it is however (...) and a man does have no need to lose his peace of mind and the others sources happiness by acquiring wealth” (Jevons, 1978, p. 16).

Therefore, he first links the idea of wealth to happiness and its (very) determinants but he needs to reduce it to market values to found his “mechanic of utility and self-interest” both as foundation and determinant of prices. To tell that political economy cannot, under the same analytical lens, deal with all the happiness’ sources and leaving a room, even analytically empty, for their consideration was one thing. But it was one another to build an epistemological framework that shapes the figure of a human actor to whom is lent a *kind of interest* – hedonist and calculating – only focusing on the consumption of scarce and exchangeable thing. On that base, the utility notion was conceptualized to penetrate the mathematical universe. Jevons (1926, p. 57) made allegiance to the Bentham’s view: “Pleasure and pains are the ultimate objects of the Calculus of Economics”. In fact, this picture eludes the place assigned to these feelings (hedonic payoff) in the lives of reflective subjects. It cannot be seriously assumed that all things and ‘state of affairs’ are valued primarily for experiencing discrete episodes of positive physical sensations (see above).

This brief and incomplete detour was necessary to introduce the following idea: most of ‘rebel’ framework in connection with the human actor and HWB have been built on the basis of a thought by systematic antinomy toward the neoclassical epistemology. With the core of the latter, the notions of *utility* and *interest* are dropped while it appears that it is the *anthropological hypothesis made around them* that are largely controversial. Thereby, it

seems that many alternative frames cut themselves off from some potential analytical tools, above all in a context where the object of study is ‘what people value and why’; so that some analytical silences remain.

Marx, by deepening the distinction between use-value and exchange value, has provided some additional tools for laying out an other route, even if that seems a priori crude. These tools are to be found mainly in his analysis of the commodity (beginning of *Capital*) for which Marx himself has explicitly emphasized that it was the most important and the most revolutionary part of his researches (Marx, 1994). There he reveals the nature of the capitalist relationships that are entirely devoted to the production of what he calls ‘the value’: a ‘real abstraction’ purely social which has for substance the social labor (wage-earning), which expresses itself monetarily by exchange values and whose course ends in a quantity of money coming to enlarge capital. Moreover, he develops the ‘value’/use-value dialectic which contains the phenomenon of the double indifference of the former. Each kind of indifference refers to a potential disjuncture which goes beyond those usually claimed by Marxists – e.g. punctual overaccumulation crisis and the contradiction between capital and labor.

Firstly, ‘the value’ being become an end in itself and interested only in its own quantity, it is primarily indifferent to the properties of the “body” that bears it – the object produced. Here stand potentially the contradiction between ‘economic value’ and the means, notably *natural*, that are however necessary to its production. Secondly, the “value”/use-value dialectic has something to bring, analytically speaking, to the wider contemporary contradiction which consists in opposing a kind of harmony in the economic order on the one hand, and the happiness of individuals on the other. The way of the sort of historical and political metaphysics needed to support it can be thought as follows: the value-maximising path of capitalist production, in a given society, can enter in contradiction with the conditions whose possession or achievement enriches the lives of individuals. These conditions have to be considered as categories of *social wealth* – use values.

An inherent point is thus the status of the utility notion. It is all the more necessary that many commentators have assumed that Marx has either neglected utility in its theory of value, or simply rejected it along with utilitarianism from the philosophical point of view.

Sen (1980-1) is amongst them:

“Marx’s case is probably the most clear of one sharp contrast – that between the belief in the importance of utility on the one hand, and the lack of any significant use of the concept of aggregate individual utility, on the other. (...) Marx was deeply critical of the submerging of various human activities in *one* relation of utility, and he was most reluctant to use the notion of total utility of a person”. (Sen, 1980-1, p. 197-198).

He bases his stance in the following Marx’s statement:

“The apparent absurdity of merging all the manifold relationships of people in the relation of usefulness, this apparently metaphysical abstraction arises from the fact that in modern bourgeois society all relations are subordinated in practice to the one abstract monetary-commercial relation... [T]hese relations are supposed not to have the meaning peculiar to them but to be the expression and manifestation of some third relation attributed to them, the *relation of utility or utilization*. (Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 1975, vol. V, p. 409).

Using the same quotation, Brenkert (1975, p. 216) argues that Marx rejected the utilitarian thinking because the latter would have endorsed an ethic which “seeks to develop a system in which people live such that their actions and relations are meaningful and morally correct in themselves – not because of their relations to something else”.

Let us now comment these assertions. First, if any disdain toward the notion of aggregate utility of a person underlines the Marxian thought, it cannot be the source of any contrast: *this notion makes simply no sense; utility is a (observable) quality and never a quantity*.

Second, Melanson (1999, p. 406) stresses that the latter position (quoting Brenkert) does not pay attention to the two following passages:

“By dubbing certain things of the outside world (...) as “goods”, man will eventually come to compare these “goods” with one another, and according to the hierarchy of his needs will arrange them in a certain order” (Marx and Engels, *Notes on Wagner's Lehrbuch der politischen Oekonomie*, 1975, vol. 24, p. 543).

“[People] call them “goods” or something else which expresses the fact that they use these things in practice, that these things are useful to them, and they give the thing this character of utility as if it possessed it, although it would hardly occur to a sheep that one of its “useful” qualities is that it can be eaten by human beings” (*ibid*, p. 539).

Marx criticised the Wagner's account of people arrive at valuing things. For him, by using things to satisfy their needs or interests, they decide that objects have a value and this is what makes the objects meaningful to us. As Melanson (*op. cit.*) puts it, the connection between the quality of an object and our need or interest is the basis for its having a new quality for us, its usefulness; and there is no suggestion in the Marxian corpus of another meaning or value which exists independently of this: he described a *historical and practical process*.

It remains to make clear what Marx attacked precisely within utility theory. Just afterwards the previous passage from *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels added:

“[t]his *paraphrasing* ceases to be meaningless and arbitrarily only when these relations have validity for the individual not on their own account, not as spontaneous activity, but rather as disguises, though by no means disguises of the category of utilisation, but of an *actual third aim and relation which is call the relation of utility*” (*ibid*, p. 409, last emphasis added).

Nothing indicates that utility isn't correct as an analytical category if it provides an accurate account of how we attribute value to relationships and become motivated to engage in them. Elsewhere in this text, they wrote: “no one can do anything without at the same time doing it for the sake of one or other of his needs and for the sake of the organ of this need” (*ibid*, p. 255). The matter is not primarily descriptive but normative and refers to the reductionism that capitalist's social relations imply according them. The “relation of utility” represents the bourgeois' view which values relations on the basis of an abstract or extraneous *kind of utility*:

“In that case, the utility relation has a quite definite meaning, namely, that I derive benefit for myself by doing harm to someone else: in this case moreover the use that I derive from some relation is entirely extraneous to this relation, as we see above in connection with ability [the ability to write verse] that from each ability a product alien to it was demanded [the production of money], a relation determined by social relations – and this is precisely the relation of utility.

“Only one relation is valid on its own account – the relation of exploitation (...). The material expression of this use is money which represents the value of all things, people and social relations”. (*ibid*, p. 409-410).

The point seems now obvious. The objection is to *monism* involved by the domination of ‘capitalist need’ of production of money and the subordination of most human relationships to the abstraction. Marx's virulent critique of Benthamite utilitarianism can be understood in his way. He saw the latter's view as a perfect apologetic complement of the real “relation of utility”. He said that Bentham “takes the modern shopkeeper, especially the English shopkeeper, as the normal man” (Marx, 1994, 1117-1118). What is wrong with the shopkeeper's view of utility is that human abilities are treated as means to be exchanged for units of pleasure (see, Green, 1983). The capitalist needs – money and pleasures – being posed as the only kinds of needs, the conditions of capitalist society can be judged as “the most advantageous and generally useful” (Marx and Engels, *ibid*, p. 414).

On that basis, Melanson (1999, p. 408-409) adds some fruitful comments. Indeed, “the reduction of the value of things to a single criterion for usefulness results in needs which are not reducible to money or ‘exchange value’ getting ignored in capitalist society”. Consequently, the critique of utility theory by Marx and Engels does not require us to value things, activities and relationships as good in themselves, “*regardless of their connection to our needs or interests*”. It appears to be fundamentally inspired “by a concern for the[i]r *plurality*” (emphasis added).

Seen in this light, their views are, at least in this respect, compatible with an approach of HWB founded on the idea of plurality of interests and thus of motives for prudential values. If our stance is wrong, how should we understand the following contemporary assertions: “The study of use-values has needed to break from the tyranny of categories derived from the study of exchange-values” (Gasper, 2004, p. 29); “SWB (...) could reflect agency achievement,

which perhaps explains some of the observed divergences between the movements of economic variables, OWB and SWB” (Gasper, 2007); “Such a rethinking [of the objective of economic activity] fits into the succession of discussions about utility and its components” (Alkire, 2002b, p. 183).

#### 4.2. Rethinking interest to subvert the egoist-altruist dichotomy

The Gasper’s assertion that agency (in)achievement can explain the SWB/income discrepancy has a potential theoretical implication the CA’s: the duality of the self between “own well-being” and “agency quality” has to be subverted. The key of that ‘subversion’ is certainly the *interest* notion. For concision purposes, only some general aspect will be approached.

Again, this idea is in ‘the air’. Giri (2000, p. 1006) is the most explicit:

“(…) in order to realize [HWB], there is a need to go beyond this dualism between self-regarding activity and other-regarding activity, beyond egoism and altruism. Other-regarding activity is not solely self-sacrificial, it is also self-nurturing. But Sen looks at other-regarding activity primarily through the prism of self-sacrifice”.

Ruta et al (2007) argue in the same direction:

“It would seem reasonable to express agency goals as simply another vector of functionings (...). One might even go so far as to conceive of agency as an essential component of well-being (...). In a less individualistic understanding of well-being, the wellbeing of family and society may be understood not only as an instrumental way of achieving one’s own wellbeing but an intrinsic part of it.”

Hinchliffe (2006) exemplifies perfectly both the problem and the ‘danger’ from the CA’s rationale point of view:

“Considering a doctor who is considering taking up a position in a poor country where she could nevertheless make a real impact, Sen suggests that she might be forced to sacrifice her well-being in favour of goals consistent with agency freedom (Sen 1992 p. 61). But as the discussion makes clear, the well-being that might be sacrificed is that of comfort and enjoyment. Whereas what we might have expected is that well-being would have been equated with the good deeds to be done in a far away poor country. (...) The problem appears to be this: so much gets caught in the web of functionings that it includes both pleasure and enjoyment on the one hand and ‘valued activities’ on the other. Of course the problem could be removed by equating functioning with valued activities and these with enjoyment and satisfaction: but if this is done, the central insight of the capability approach is lost and it simply becomes another variant of utilitarianism”.

Which “central insights” is so important for deliberately cutting the approach of so many heuristically well-founded foundations? Again, to be scared of becoming utilitarian is relevant only in the extent which the principles of this doctrine are accepted: happiness and utility are reduced to experiencing discrete episodes of physical sensation and these are the only aim to be valued. Equating functioning with valued activities is right, but there is analytically no reason to equating it, in turn, with enjoyment or any psychological emotion which will manifest the connection of the activity with a goal, an expectation or a standard of the person.

Sen (1993, p. 36) argues:

“The well-being achievement of a person can be seen as an evaluation of the ‘wellness’ of the person’s state of being (rather than, say, the goodness of her contribution to the country, or her success in achieving her overall goals). The exercise, then, is that of assessing the constituent elements of the person’s being seen from the perspective of her own personal welfare. (...) This does not, of course, imply that a person’s well-being cannot be ‘other-regarding’. Rather, the effect of ‘other-regarding’ concerns on has to operate *through* some feature of the person’s own being. Doing good may make a person contented or fulfilled, and these are functioning achievements of importance”.

In a footnote (ibid, p. 35-36), he writes: “a failure to achieve one’s *non*-well-being objectives may also cause frustration, thereby reducing one’s well-being.”

Therefore, in the Sen’s frame some states eventually valued, like the justice of patters of income distribution, or the stability of habitats for endangered species, which are so because the fact of living in a society which is cohesive and does not endanger the life of future generations constitutes the conditions of a fulfilling life, can be linked to my being and its wellness only through the potential discrete mental state and thus linked to the ‘experiencing pleasure’ functioning. Somewhat the hedonist doctrine finds a ‘second youth’. As Giri (2000,

p. 1005) asks, “are they not also an *integral* and *central* part of the quest for well-being?” Which goals can be important for me without they themselves refer to values which are central for the wellness of *my being*? What are the part of my being that are not constituent of its wellness and thus to my ‘personal’ welfare? Where is the frontier between things and states that concerns just my ‘own’ life and those who are outside it, so that they are ranged under the ‘agency goals’ category? It is in this perspective that Gasper (2002) and Van Staveren and Gasper (2003) argue that the Sen’s conceptions of personhood and well-being are too thin to be an adequate basis for human development.

The Sen’s dualisation of the self seems to be a product of the general one which dominates most of alternative approaches of the human actor in social sciences. In the general case, it is asserted that some of his action would be guided by his ‘*self-interest*’; others would be guided by *disinterested motivations* (see, for example, Becker, 2006). Sen (1987b, p. 41) assert:

“We can see the person, in terms of agency, recognizing and respecting his or her ability to form goals, commitments, values, etc. and we can also see the person in terms of well-being. The dichotomy is lost in a model of exclusively self-interested motivation in which person’s agency must be entirely geared to his own well-being”

Sen attributes this self-interested view of HWB to ‘utilitarianism’ (Sen and Williams, 1982) and often offers a trenchant critique of self-interest as the sole motor of human action (Giri, 2000). But as others conceptualization, he fails to provide the epistemological foundations of the ‘disinterested motivations’ apart from some references to ‘moral codes’ or ‘duties’ whose provenance remains analytically uncertain.

It can be argued that this is not the interest category as such that must be dropped but the *anthropological hypothesis* made around it by utilitarian philosophy: all actions are fully conscious and deliberate and, above all these are made under the scope of the *methodical* pursuit of an *individual advantage* by employing the means of *calculus* – the arithmetic of pleasures and pains. It is not so the kind of objects (commodities) for which the neoclassical universe have projected this kind of interest which is ultimately significant, but the ‘calculating’ attribute toward the pleasures and pains, the former being posed as the ultimate end of each action. The demultiplication, historically speaking, of individual market transactions is seen as validating and reflecting these attributes, but, at least, it can be argued first that they constitutes categories historically and socially determined and, second, that the utilitarian interest is *just one form of interest*.

Consequently, the task is to justify the association between the one’s “agency goals” to some *interest* of his self in the extent where these goals are connected to some *values* that are constituent of his being and its wellness. It is one of the merits of Lordon (2006) to have, first, recalling the latter statements and, second, to delineate the means of redefining and enlarging the interest category for subverting the egoist-altruist dichotomy, as Giri (2000) wonder. To be short, a “general economy of practices” as well as an “economy of the satisfaction” external to the “axiomatic of the interest – the analytical accounting of pleasures and pains” can be founded under the Spinozian matricial interest, namely the ‘conatus’. As the energy representing “the endeavour of each thing to persevere in his being”, the ‘conatus’ is the fundamental form of interest – the force of desire and a pole of activity – from which derived all the “specific interests” to be pursued, fundamentally socially determined (Lordon (2006) talks also about distinct “regimes of desires” – of material things, symbolic things, etc.).

The discussions concerning the human valuation of nature are quite advanced on that matter and contained mainly the same terms. Aldred (1997, p. 159-160), for instance, synthesizes them. He first follows many commentators who argue that making choices on the basis of ethical beliefs does not necessarily involve ‘self-sacrifice’: that adherence to moral and other commitments can be an objective. He continues by affirming that this “possibility of support for the environment being essentially self-interested, improving the agent’s welfare by giving them a ‘warm glow’ or preventing feelings of guilt, is not inevitable”. Relying on



Sen's concept of "commitment", this author proposes to decoupling "the two notions of value which are commonly linked – welfare and utility": the defining characteristic of ethical 'value' (motivations) regarding environment becomes "*utility in the absence of welfare (...) or well-being*" (emphasis added). In his own word, the "essential point is that choices driven by commitment will be utility-maximising but not welfare-maximising". What ultimately motivates commitment? Why a thing or a state that I judge desirable from the ethical point of view cannot form part of the conditions for a life of going well – corresponding, recall, to the etymology of the term welfare? Aldred (1997) admits that this kind of choice brings *utility*: if it just refers to the positive psychological emotions, why not, as Sen proposes, linking it to welfare as he understands? If not, where, ontologically speaking, can be located this 'feeling'? Perhaps, he would have to extend his espousal of Sen's thought by indicating the fulfilment of objectives other than for one's own functionings appears not as part of well-being but as part of 'quality of life'.

Isn't it more attractive, analytically, to say that for the person, the connection between a state – say, the protection of endangered species – and one of my concerns or goals creates a third quality – its utility? Isn't it also more attractive to say that, as part of goals, standards and expectations which form my being, the ethical or symbolical ones contributes also to the wellness of the latter?

Still concerning the environmental area and especially the misinterpretations and dangers of anti-anthropocentrism, Hayward (1997) states:

"It would also appear to be unavoidable that we should be interested in ourselves and our own kind. (...) for just as the term 'self-centred' has been used figuratively in the past to describe well-organised, balance people, so being human-centred can mean having a well-balanced conception of what it is to be human. (...) In sum, a positive concern for human well-being need not automatically preclude a concern for the well-being of non-humans, *and may even serve to promote it.*"

"The idea of anthropocentrism is typically understood as analogous to egocentrism: but just as the latter is anything but unproblematic, if it implies a simple, unitary centred ego, so too is anthropocentrism – for the human species is all too at odds with itself. If the project of bringing humanity to peace with itself, of constituting itself *as* a body which is sufficiently unified to be considered 'centred' is anthropocentric, though, it is anthropocentric in a sense I have suggested should be applauded rather than condemned. To be sure, what attitude such a body has towards non-humans cannot be predicted before the event, but there is good reason to think that such a unified and peaceful body is more likely to be considerate – or at least guided by *a far-sighted and ecologically enlightened conception of its self-interest* – than one which is driven by internal strife.

The first passage seems have a normative character. Are we fundamentally 'self-centred', so that interests for others – humans and non-humans – are just the form taken by an interest for us, primary and irreducible? Or, should we be self-interested – the notion delimiting thus a frontier between conditions concerning "our own lives" and others which do not – but not too much? The second passage has also a normative component and seems prospective. Overcoming the ecological crisis is not the matter of achievement of objectivity founded on the imputation of an 'intrinsic value' for each natural component. It rests on the socio-historical conditions which would ensure that 'ecologically friendly' linkages between society and nature, at all levels, forms part of the self-interest of its members, so that of their welfare. The ethical criticism of anthropocentrism holds that the latter is the mistake of giving exclusive or arbitrarily consideration to human interests as opposed to the interests of other being. Hayward (1997) that this position is based on an "equivocal notion of anthropocentrism": the reappraisal of the interest notion is able to subvert the apparent opposition. Why not so for the distinction between "own well-being" and "agency goals"?

#### 4.3. *The 'Aspirations-Achievement Gap' Model in the context of people's evaluations of their lives*

The "self-evaluation" of welfare is not rejected in the Sen's CA in the extent where it is based on the various "beings" and "doings" that the person "reflectively" values. Until now, we have argued this stance reflects *a kind of subjectivism* which Sen, paradoxically, seems 'activate' (rightly) against the two dominant subjective theories without never putting in light

its substantive content. The “deliberate incompleteness” can be seen as an additional signal for laying out this route and some authors have already provided some theoretical landmarks. We have argued that the reconsideration of notions of value, utility, happiness and interest should be essential in this direction. They can form the structure of a conceptual framework with a strong intuitive appeal in the context of the people’s evaluations of their lives.

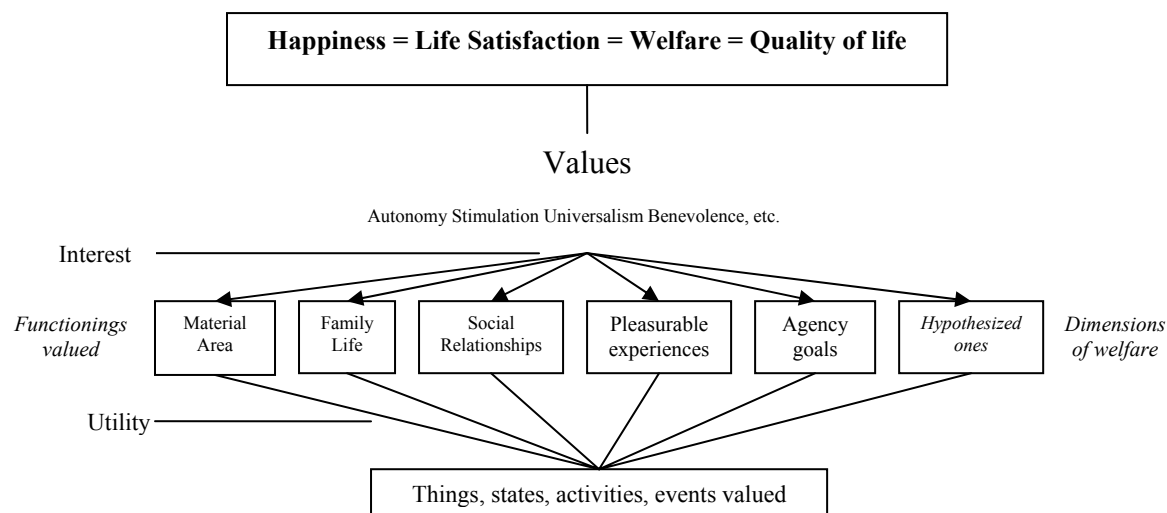


FIGURE 1. The “self-evaluation” conceptual framework

Four categories of comments will help to clarify some elements. Firstly, this frame shares some points of intersection with the Ruta et al’s work. If the definition of quality of life as “the gap between capability expectations and reality” is attractive, its view, in turn, as the “final outcome of a causal pathway that begins with goods and resources [e.g. income] and in which functionings/valued capabilities constitute the intermediate causal step” seems questionable. Do they talk about some functionings than can reasonably whose achievement is linked to the acquisition of some resources? Or about all functionings valued? They further write:

“In moving from the first step in the causal pathway, the acquisition of some resource, good or commodity, through the causal sequence of events in which that resource is translated into certain functionings, which, if valued as capabilities, leads to the achievement of wellbeing and agency goals, culminating in a good quality of life, then one may be perceived to be progressing from the objectively to the subjectively measurable”

Either any irreducible Sen’s companion or any interested “outsider” may be perplex. The first step of the causal pathway reproduces exactly the one which Sen has elaborated as a didactic figure for justify his approach, but now judged as at least insufficient for providing a “comprehensive overview of well-being”, in the Clark’s words. Thus, all the functionings valued by individuals – in terms of their well-being and agency – seems ultimately ‘hanging’ to the ‘resource’ sphere, for which, besides, Sen has never provided the exact analytical contours (see, Clark, 2005). It becomes then unclear how it can have a “causal pathway” between “goods and commodities” and the achievement in agency goals. Moreover, the ‘hanging’ status of agency goals prevents any analysis that hypothesises them as the “*destabilising variables*” that Ruta et al. proposes as exerting perturbations around their praised “homeostasis” hypothesis.

Secondly, the arguments of the previous parts explain the upper component of the figure 1. Happiness, in its cognitive aspect, consists in a positive evaluation of the conditions of yours life, a judgment that, on balance and taking everything into account, your life is going well for you. It is thus identified with life satisfaction and this is running through much of the recent

philosophical literature on happiness (see Sumner, 1996; Tatarkiewicz, 1976; Michalos, 1980). Then, the equating of happiness with welfare, the terms taken with its etymological sense, should not injure anyone. Equating all of these with ‘quality of life’ can hurt some CA’s conservative followers but there is plausible argument for subverting the well-being plus agency model, so that the ‘agency goals’ can enter the “self-evaluation” of welfare.

If accepted at the theoretical level, this assertion becomes then an empirical matter. The level of the ‘functionings valued’ could have been left ‘empty’. The conditions that enrich the person’s life are to be determined by him. We just reported some usual categories that recent empirical researches have recorded as recurrent on this matter (see below). The point here is that, at the ontological level, an identity is assumed between various denominations employed within distinct approaches – ‘functionings valued’, ‘dimensions of well-being’, ‘domains of satisfaction’, ‘categories of wealth’ (see 4.1.). We join thus the claim addressed by Gasper (2004, p. 13): “*Utilities not utility, and life spheres not only the market*”; “there are various types of mental attitude, not a single ‘utility’, and various spheres of life with distinct forms of thought, not only the impersonal utilitarian market (...) these cannot be all subsumed by a single type of calculation”.

Between the two structuring components of the scheme, we add an intermediary one which can be the object of huge discussions. It makes reference to the *values* from which the conditions of the enriching life arise. We can first notice that its inscription in the scheme does not suggest that the “self-evaluation” contains any systematic reference to them. The rationale for this inclusion is that many recent discussions around the identification of “dimensions of well-being” or “human development” have been grounded at this level (see Clark, 2002; Alkire, 2002a, 2002b; Qizilbash, 2002), and some characters of these can be fruitful from the point of view of our approach.

Alkire (2002b) examines the potential of various approaches in terms of lists of dimensions for fulfilling the CA’s incompleteness. A vast number of lists, with very distinct epistemological foundations, are enumerated, including both “subjective” and “objective” inspired ones. Again, a kind of *midway* seems finally to be praised. To found a nonpaternalistic and useful tool, the author endorses the Finnis’ theoretical conception of “basic human values”. On that base, Alkire (2002b, p. 186) suggests a characterisation of the dimensions of human development: these “*are nonhierarchical, irreducible, incommensurable and hence basic kinds of human ends*” (emphasis added). In her words, they have to represent the “basic reasons for action which are incommensurable in kind” (ibid, p. 194). The point is to avoid deficiencies of approaches based on “psychological consideration”, “political necessity” and some “general not-yet-moral prudential reasoning” (ibid, p. 185). It remains that the “epistemological key” called to fill in the Sen’s blank is uncertain. The specification requires “participatory processes of discussion and deliberation” but the Finnis’ fundamental account has a *fundamentally objective character*. When talking about prudential value, philosophers as Finnis simply put forward a list of things and activities they consider to be good for a person, irrespective of whether that person has any pro-attitude towards these things or not. The “self-evidence” argument (ibid, p. 185) as an epistemological foundation of an objective account of well-being is controversial. Placing the “primary colours” of human development – of welfare – at the level of the person’s values defined primarily as basic reasons for action seems attractive. However, the usefulness of what constitutes an objective account of these remains unclear. If the final aims of the approach are: (1) to support “participatory processes of discussion and deliberation”; (2) to facilitate “empirical testing” about hypothetizable “universal values”, so the “value added” of an allegiance to any pre-specified list is doubtful, apart from any normative preoccupation. The matter about person’s values as referring, to be short, to intrapsychic constellations of norms and precepts that guide his judgements and actions and, retrospectively, that make sense of

our emotions, attitudes and concerns, would be better located in a sociological and psycho-sociological analysis in order to answer to a Sen's question: why "these values [are they] cherished". At this stage, the "objectivity" stance about values which are shared in a society ambiguous", at least if the term "objectivity" is understood in its main philosophical sense. Ruta et al. (2007) offer a short analysis on that matter:

"One might attempt a reconciliation of the objective and subjective views in the context of quality of life by arguing, as Morreim does, that 'objective' quality of life assessments are only objective in the sense that they are made on the basis of inter-subjectively observable, material facts about a person weighted by some form of socially shared evaluation of how those facts impact upon the person's quality of life (Morreim, 1986). Thus, a normative, 'objective' evaluation by which functionings can be assessed for their contribution to a person's quality of life is possible only in the sense that it represents the mean subjective valuation of society. (...) It assumes that valuations of quality of life do not vary with the position of the evaluator relative to the life being valued. We believe this not to be the case, and that the 'position-relativity' implicit in our definition of quality of life constitutes a powerful argument in its favour".

We are inclined to briefly complete the picture by a kind of reciprocal reasoning. The personal process of justification of any judgment or action will refer to internalised norms and precepts which have acquired the status of personal values. The 'objectivity' stance here can be referred to the personal travel for arriving at a common point of view in the "space of reasons". The basic reasons for action refer to a common territory – inter-subjective – which gives sense to actions in a given social and institutional context: "The project of figuring out what is valuable is a project of self-understanding, of making sense of one's own valuing. This cannot be a purely individual project, for the attitudes one has that transcend mere liking are partly constituted by social norms of appropriateness that inhabit the public space of reasons" (Anderson, 1993, p. 95). Values, like norms, are a group-level phenomenon requiring shared agreement. The firsts capture nevertheless a personal ideal, in the sense that people acting in accordance with values do not feel pushed as they do when acting under normative pressure (see Hitlin and Piliavin, 2004). If they are only distally related to concrete behaviours, values are intimately tied to the self and his self-conceptions of his good.

### **5. A new answer to the 'Easterlin Paradox'**

Di Tella and MacCulloch (2005, p. 3) argue that a "natural hypothesis is that omitted variables could also explain [the 'Easterlin Paradox']". It is striking to note that to support their hypothesis, they globally make no reference to the various literatures in social sciences that have been challenged by the exercise of conceptualizing and measuring HWB on a multidimensional basis. A short paragraph indicates that their approach echoes the old debates surrounding the appropriateness of using GDP as an indicator of development; and the deduced claimed of authors and organizations for more comprehensive measures of well-being, capturing other elements of modern life besides income, in particular environmental and societal 'degradations'.

On that base a set of variables are introduced as arguments of a rather sophisticated function of individual preferences: the "general conditions that affect well-being" (affecting environment or health, approximated by emissions of  $SO_x$ , and the amount of crime in society); income; leisure and its quality (approximated by the 'quality of family' and the size of the city of residence; uncertainty (mainly linked to the employment variables). Then, they estimate the part of change over time in reported happiness that can accounted for by changes in each variable, based on their actual change and their estimated impact on happiness. The conclusion is rather negative. First, changes in life expectancy, hours worked and  $SO_x$  emissions are 'net contributors' to happiness. But adding the actual impact of other variables besides income lead one to expect happiness levels that are even higher, making the unexplained trend in happiness data larger than when just changes in income are considered. Thereby, "there is some evidence that people care about other variables besides income. This may provide some support to the idea that GDP is not a good measure of welfare and that we

should develop broader indicators of gross domestic happiness (...). Although this idea appears related to the Easterlin Paradox, such broader measures do not help explain why happiness is stationary since they have moved, on average, in a favourable way” (ibid, p. 27).

For researchers interested in well-being issues, the matter cannot be left at that. It can be argued that all potential “broader measures” reflecting HWB are not exhausted with the latter exercise, and that the core ‘object’ of the work – HWB – has been not investigated enough to support its plausible intuition. The theoretical and the empirical strategy are indissolubly linked and failures in the latter cannot be stated without any return to the rationale of the former, either in terms of domains of HWB, or in terms of variables reflecting them.

The approach developed in this article aims at contributing to this effort. The ground of theoretical convergence between major approaches of HWB – the “self-evaluation” in reference to the conditions that people value – enables to reconsider the question. Beyond the theoretical level, many others recent contributions, admittedly scattered, can be mobilized in this direction.

First, the “Domains-of-life approach” of “life-satisfaction” as a part of the SWB approach contains some interesting elements from our point of view (see Rojas, 2004). A person’s welfare – expressed through an answer to a question such as “*On the whole, are you satisfied with the life you lead?*” – is studied in its relationship to her situation in many aspects of her life. The ‘life satisfaction’ variable is supposed to be less volatile and more cognitive oriented than the ‘happiness’ one in recent empirical researches on SWB (see, for instance, Argyle 2001; Michalos, 1980).<sup>5</sup> The domains of life refer to concrete areas where a person functions as human being. The approach attempts to understand a general appraisal of life as a whole on the basis of a multidimensional vector of specific appraisals in more concrete spheres of being (see van Praag et al, 2003). The enumeration and demarcation of domains is fundamentally arbitrary, so that “it can go from a small number to an almost infinite recount of all imaginable human activities and spheres of being. Thus, there are many possible partitions of a human life; and the selected partition depends on the research’s objectives.” The idea is that “once the subjectivity of well-being is recognised, it is possible to test and look for objective indicators that are good proxies of well-being” (Rojas, 2004, p. 3-5).

On that base, the Gasper’s assertions - that the contemporary economic variables/SWB discrepancy could reflect some agency [un]achievement and, more generally, negative effects of the formers on various aspects of life besides concerns with status and relative position – finds here a room for further specification and empirical testing.

Again, at this level, there is ‘no desert’. Two categories of agency goals can be developed, analytically speaking, on the basis of existing works. It concerns: (1) natural environment and its quality; (2) the cohesion of society. It echoes the two major concerns of the sustainability of human societies. To be short, many recent works have promoted environmental degradation – general or contextual – as a potential determinant of ‘life satisfaction’ (see, Ferrer-i-Carbonell and Gowdy, 2007; Vemuri and Costanza, 2006; Collados and Duane, 1999). The linkages between the two variables are potentially numerous, and one of them can be the direct importance of environmental awareness to HWB through ethical concerns toward future generations. The same can be said about the idea of social cohesion or quality of society. Some organizations have for goal to provide working conceptualizations and frames for measurement with the following motive in mind: “The position is taken that although social cohesion represents a societal quality it affects the individual quality of life because the elements of social cohesion are perceived and experienced by the members of the society. Thus, the social cohesion of a society can be conceived as an aspect relevant to the individual life situation, and in this sense, it represents a part of the quality of life. Under this perspective a broad conceptualisation of quality of life seems appropriate. Quality of life can be

considered as the overarching policy goal which includes social cohesion as one component.” (Berger-Schmitt, 2000, p. 28; see also, Berger-Schmitt, 2002; Noll, 2002; Chan et al, 2006).

Besides, the two essential goal dimensions inherent in the concept – the inequality dimension (income, various disparities and, more largely, exclusion) and the social capital dimension – have been each one related to ‘life-satisfaction’ both at the individual level and at the macro level (average responses) (see Haller and Hadler, 2006; Helliwell and Putnam, 2004; Helliwell, 2003; Alesina et al, 2004; Senik, 2005; Bjørnskov, 2003).

The idea is that these two broad domains can constitute the basis of the idea of shared agency goals in human societies apparently touched by a ‘great contradiction’, in the Hamilton’s words. Having theoretically placed these kinds of preoccupations at the level of concerns forming part of individuals’ welfare, it remains to develop around them the appropriate conceptual and methodological framework for empirical testing.

## 6. Conclusion

This article has fundamentally a theoretical orientation, but which aim is to support an empirical investigation about the explanation of the ‘Easterlin Paradox’. This support is based on the identification of what we identify as being the ground of theoretical convergence between the two contemporary approaches of HWB that have achieved prominence in social sciences, namely the Sen’s CA and the SWB approach.

As Comim (see above) indicates, “the most difficult hurdle for bringing together these two approaches seem to consist in the CA’s critique of subjective well-being in its many different forms”. However, while Sen places a great deal of objective concerns, his underlying theory about the nature of welfare still comes out looking very subjective. Our aim is not to destroy all confidence towards this approach. Sen claims himself for the pluralism of approaches and Ruta et al (2007) rightly assert that the subjective evaluation of the person’s conditions is a plausible route for fulfilling the “deliberate incompleteness” of the CA. Besides, the very indecision is posed as a general (often ambiguously) strength: “In answer to the question “who decides what makes a good life?” Sen contends that there are some significant cases in which everyone can agree about the nature of well-being whatever their more general commitment and that debate about others is part of what makes a good life in a good society (Anand et al, 2005).

Therefore, the door is not completely closed regarding subjectivism and this article has tried to enumerate the main theoretical implications of the endorsement of the “self-evaluation” whose reflective and cognitive ‘virtues’ have been praised by Sen himself against what he called the “common interpretations of utility”. He evades largely however the question of its content and of its substantive role in the CA. It is just certain that it is about “what people does or does not value”. The notions of utility, happiness and interest have to be reconsidered in this perspective and we have just established some areas of discussions around them. A “self-evaluation” framework brings the reasoning closer to some area of discussions within the SWB literature. Above all, the general and intuitive appeal of this approach contributes, as Ruta et al’s work, to the ongoing effort toward “a widely accepted general theory of the nature of quality of life, and its relationships to known and hypothesised causal determinants”. The latter words of this sentence are of special interest from the point of view of our initial purpose – supporting a new answer to the ‘Easterlin Paradox’. It remains to concretise empirically, at this stage, an intuition shared by many, namely the existence of a great contradiction between a (relative) harmony in the economic order on one hand, and the happiness of individuals on the other.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Alkire (2002a, 2002b) advocates for Finnis' theoretical conception of 'basic human values' which is often cited as a typical example of objective theories (see, Varelius, 2004; Sumner, 1996; Scanlon, 1993). For her, this conception has three main advantages: (i) it enables and requires participation in application; (ii) it "has objective foundations"; (iii) it can "coherently engage with and be refined by the large and growing literatures on happiness, subjective well-being, quality of life indicators, and views of the poor (...)" (Alkire, 2002a, p. 27).

<sup>2</sup> "It seems to me, then, that Sen needs to be more radical than he has been so far in his criticism of the utilitarian accounts of well-being, by introducing an objective normative account of human functioning and by describing a procedure of objective evaluation by which functionings can be assessed for their contribution to the good human life" (Nussbaum, 1988, p. 176).

<sup>3</sup> It is thus tempting to attribute the main direction taken by Sen's closest associates as the resultant of these advises. Indeed, Alkire (2002b, 193) seems to seek to avoid paternalism and to combine a substantive theory with reasoned public debate when she describes the conditions of adequacy for dimensions of human development. They must: "be valuable" (reasons for actions); "combine scope with specificity"; "not pertain to one view of the good human life".

<sup>4</sup> Sen clearly poses the problem, but he seems to evade it by insisting on the 'dominance-ranking' issue: "In an evaluative exercise, we can distinguish between two different questions: (1) *What* are the objects of value? (2) *How valuable* are the respective objects? (...) the identification of the objects of value is *substantively* the primary exercise which makes it possible to pursue the second question." (Sen, 1993, p. 32).

<sup>5</sup> It is outside the scope of the paper to develop that, but the question of the kind of information an answer to a typical satisfaction question provides is important. On the one hand, some authors argue that the cognitive component in the response is likely to be very low and more generally that it is not clear what the subject appraises (see, Cummins, 2003; Veenhoven, 1997). On the other hand, some others show that there is some cognitive evaluation of life and of its purpose when people answer a SWB question (see, Peiró, 2006; Rojas, 2004).

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