

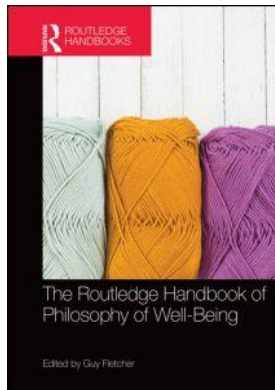
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WELL-BEING AND
DISADVANTAGE*Jonathan Wolff and Douglas Reeve*

Yalding in Kent, UK, is no stranger to winter floods. This small village at the confluence of the rivers Tiese, Beult, and Medway experienced the Christmas flood of 1927, the multiple floods of 2000, and their latest inundation on Christmas Eve, 2013. Residents of the unfortunately named Little Venice Country Park in Yalding suffered evacuation and loss of property. A serious problem no doubt, but not as severe as those suffered by many others elsewhere. Lives were not lost. Prime Minister David Cameron, on a televised visit to the area, seemed genuinely taken aback when a local resident scolded him for lack of action in preventing or responding to the latest torrent engulfing the village. Imagine his further discomfort when just one week later the Environment Agency announced it was cutting jobs in flood protection in England as part of a major restructuring of the organization, albeit that this decision had been taken several months earlier. On the face of it, some investment to protect the well-being of Kentish villagers would seem justified. However, a protective barrier for Yalding would cost around £20 million, and raising that sum has not proved easy in times of budget cuts and austerity. The challenge for government policy makers is not just how best to allocate the Environment Agency's funds but also how to distribute scarce funds across multiple diverse areas, including the environment, health care, pensions, education. It is a complex challenge and probably a thankless task, in that even an optimal allocation of resources will leave many problems unresolved.

How should local and central government politicians respond to such situations, and what, if anything, can philosophers offer to guide their efforts? Most politicians would accept that they are in their roles to protect and promote the well-being of their constituents. Political philosophers have debated at length what constitutes well-being and how governments should act. Egalitarian theorists have invested enormous efforts exploring what exactly should be equalized without reaching a broadly held consensus. But whilst many such theorists differ on the details, it appears that most agree on one common factor: *to identify the least advantaged and prioritize actions to reduce their disadvantage*. Of course there will be differences of opinion amongst egalitarian philosophers about how strongly one should prioritize such actions but the nature of the proposals that follow does not require that the priority be absolute. Indeed, the general aim is left sufficiently vague to enable the inclusion of non-egalitarian theorists. It is assumed that the proportion of philosophers and policy makers who would deny any priority to the least advantaged would be small. This limited convergence is sufficient to get the investigation started and

our aim is to suggest practical measures for policy makers based on the theories and research of human well-being in political philosophy and other academic disciplines. (The background and research for much of this chapter are detailed in Wolff and de-Shalit 2007.)

If policy makers are to prioritize actions to reduce disadvantage amongst the least advantaged it follows that, first of all, they need an understanding of what it is to be disadvantaged. It is perhaps natural at first glance to link disadvantage with poverty, and poverty with low income. However, it is now widely accepted that disadvantage can take many forms, that might not be directly connected to low income, including poor health, loneliness, or addiction. Indeed, some of these forms of disadvantage may not be adequately offset by increases in income. Recognizing that the many determinants of well-being may not be reducible to a common currency such as income leads to the view that advantage and disadvantage are best understood in a pluralist form. Unfortunately, this insight on its own is not enough to enable policy makers to achieve their task.

One response to the multi-faceted nature of well-being is to identify and address “separate spheres” of disadvantage, arguing that, because they are incommensurable, they are best subjected to local justice, in the sense of treating each area in isolation from others. Arguably, this is what often happens in practice, with separate government departments focused on distinct issues, such as education, transport, and health. However, this response leaves the problem of how to allocate budgets across the separate spheres. It also leaves the concern that the least advantaged overall may not have been identified and prioritized.

A second response, that we advocate in the main body of this chapter, builds on a modified version of the Capability Approach developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, and originally proposed in Wolff and de-Shalit (2007). The final part of this piece furthers this approach by incorporating research on Self-Determination Theory (SDT), pioneered by the social psychologists Richard Ryan and Edward Deci, to extend the practical guidance offered to policy makers.

Extending the Capability Approach

The well-established Capability Approach, extensively debated over the last 20 years, seeks to understand someone’s well-being by attending to what she can do or be, known as her “capability to function.” Although Sen has withheld from defining a list of such functionings or capabilities, Nussbaum has published and refined a working list of central capabilities that have become a starting point for many interested in this field.¹ An abbreviated form of Nussbaum’s list is as follows:

1. Life: Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length.
2. Bodily health: Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished, to have adequate shelter.
3. Bodily integrity: Being able to move freely from place to place; being able to be secure against assault, including sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.
4. Sense, imagination, and thought: Being able to imagine, think, and reason—and to do these things in a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education. Freedom of expression, speech, and religion.
5. Emotions: Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us.
6. Practical reason: Being able to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life.

7. Affiliation: Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction. Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation. Not being discriminated against on the basis of gender, religion, race, ethnicity, and the like.
8. Other species: Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.
9. Play: Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.
10. Control over one's environment: Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life. Being able to have real opportunity to hold property. Having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others.

In looking to identify the least advantaged and develop practical guidance for policy makers, Nussbaum's list prompts several questions. Firstly, is it complete: have all the central capabilities been identified? Secondly, are all ten capabilities of equal importance, and if not how should they be weighted? A quick inspection suggests they cannot be of equal importance since *life* is more fundamental than *play*, and with that realization comes the specter of even greater complexity facing would-be policy makers when trying to identify the least advantaged. However, through a combination of intuition and empirical research, supported by practical results from the field of epidemiology, the apparent complexity of the Capability Approach might be restricted and some enhancements made possible. *Disadvantage* examined how Nussbaum's list of ten capabilities was tested for completeness and relative importance (Wolff and de-Shalit 2007).

Dynamic public reflective equilibrium

The process adopted was a form of "reflective equilibrium." In general, this refers to the testing of various parts of our moral outlook, or a new theory, by checking for coherence with the remainder of our moral and non-moral beliefs. Beliefs that do not cohere in one way or another raise an alarm. It could be that the theory under consideration itself is unsound and should be modified, or, it could indicate that some other element of our overall belief system is doubtful and in need of further examination.

John Rawls famously introduced the technique in his *A Theory of Justice*, although he drew similarities to earlier techniques of justification described by Nelson Goodman (Rawls 1971: 20). Rawls describes a thought process that might perhaps better be labeled as "private reflective equilibrium," in which the thinker tests her provisional moral theories for coherence with her broader set of beliefs. In such a case both the theory under examination and the broader set of beliefs are specific to the experimenter and may be at odds with the population at large.

A second approach that might be termed "contextual reflective equilibrium" emerges from the work of Michael Walzer (1993, 1994). His views seem to imply that theories of political philosophy should be assessed against the moral beliefs of the particular communities to which they are applied. In this model, the philosopher observes the actions and expressed views of a given society and develops theories to represent their morality. However, although the behavior observed may accurately reflect the views of the community, the theory remains solely that of the philosopher.

Taking this line of development one stage further leads to a model of "dynamic public reflective equilibrium," by which the theories considered are those of the society at large, as well as the philosopher, and where the philosopher engages the public in the process of finding a reflective equilibrium. In this way, the philosophers' theories are revised and modified according to the theories

and intuitions of the selected participants. This model asserts that people's intuitions, beliefs, and theories should be a primary input for a political philosophy that seeks to influence practical policies. The voices of the disadvantaged are specifically included.

Applying this approach to Nussbaum's list of central capabilities involved four initial steps:

1. General exploratory discussions about how well the categories of capability (functionings) covered the positions of those most would consider disadvantaged in some way or other.
2. Identification of additional categories of functionings that might be considered central.
3. Testing of the combined list of functionings with initially 38, and later another 60, interviewees from Israel and England selected for their special knowledge of disadvantage—either as workers with disadvantaged individuals or groups, or their clients.
4. Further revision of the list of functionings based on the interviewees' input.

What emerged from this process was that Nussbaum's list appears admirably comprehensive but with room for the inclusion of possibly four further functionings.

The first of these increments is a response to the idea that the original ten functionings may place too much emphasis on the person as receiver; a focus on what one is entitled to and how one benefits from the process of distribution. With a nod to republican thinking, it was suggested that what matters on the topic of well-being is not just what one is entitled to, but also what one is able to contribute to society. Caring for others is seemingly an important part of one's well-being. The potential new functioning might be captured as:

- Doing good to others. Being able to care for others as part of expressing your humanity. Being able to show gratitude (Wolff and de-Shalit 2007: 45–61).

The remaining three incremental functionings that surfaced during the process were:

- Living in a law-abiding fashion. The possibility of being able to live within the law; not being forced to break the law, cheat, or to deceive other people or institutions.
- Understanding the law. Having a general comprehension of the law, its demands, and the opportunities it offers to individuals. Not standing perplexed facing the legal system.
- Being able to communicate, including being able to speak the local language, or being verbally independent.

Some might argue that these additional categories overlap with, or replicate, other capabilities that are already on the list. It perhaps depends upon how one understands the terminology, but the aim here is to avoid any important omissions.

Having addressed the question of possible completeness we are able to turn to the question of relative importance.

Interviewees were asked to identify the most important categories of functioning, and the resulting analysis suggested a broad consensus for the following:

- life;
- bodily health;
- bodily integrity;
- affiliation (more often described as “belonging”);
- control over one's environment;
- sense, imagination, and thought (including education).

This step of reducing from 14 to the six most central or core functioning categories might seem like progress but it does not remove the weighting problem, to which we return later.

Functioning security

To this point we have not focused on the distinction between *functioning*, such as being well nourished, and the *capability* or freedom to achieve full nourishment. The former is more easily measurable while the latter emphasizes the important freedom to choose, and hence in accounts such as Nussbaum's what matters is whether people have the capability to achieve functionings, whether or not they choose to do so. In some cases the appeal of this view is clear: it is important, for example, that people have the capability to pursue their preferred religion if they choose to do so, but it would be quite wrong for the state to force, or even encourage, individuals to pursue religious goals. However it is unclear how far this example generalizes. Sen points out that a wealthy person may choose to go without food and thus lack the functioning of being nourished, while all along having the capability to be nourished. Such a person has no claim on the government for food. But in practical terms the force of the example is less clear. We can make sense of a wealthy person who for religious or political reasons chooses to starve, yet such a person would not in any case seek food from the state. In other cases where someone deliberately chooses to be undernourished we typically regard her behavior as exhibiting an eating disorder, needing medical attention, rather than an exercise of freedom on the model of religious freedom.

From these reflections it is far from clear that it is right to assume that only capabilities and not functionings are the legitimate concern of governments. Furthermore, the relationship between choice and well-being is complex. In the case of nourishment, for example, what seems important may not be whether one chooses to be nourished or not, but rather that one is able to choose how to obtain nourishment: i.e., to be able to exercise freedom in choosing the foods and meal times that one prefers or feels most appropriate. We will return to this important issue in the final section.

To recap, Sen and Nussbaum emphasize the notion of capabilities, yet whether or not people achieve functionings can also be a legitimate concern of governments. From this it be might thought possible to identify disadvantage with regard to one aspect of bodily health simply by observing whether an individual is, or is not, adequately nourished. However, this overlooks an important element that is missing in the standard Capability Approach, the element of future risk. The comfortably positioned individual with a good income and stable surroundings will not only be well nourished today but can expect to be so next week, next month, and next year. Another equally well-nourished individual may, however, be down to her last few items of food with no income or obvious means to provide for her own or her family's nourishment in the near or distant future. Current levels of functioning can in this way mask a major disadvantage in future functioning. Risk to central capabilities may induce choices and behaviors that compound the problem. The father with an empty cupboard may be forced to consider high-risk employment or breaking the law in order to feed his children, thus spreading the risk associated with one functioning to another. Furthermore, the impending loss of a central functioning is not only a disadvantage in itself but the anxiety created by functionings at risk is an additional disadvantage with probable further impacts on health and well-being. It follows that functioning security is a vital part of one's well-being and its absence is a major contributor to disadvantage.

Policy makers might reasonably respond to this state of affairs by providing opportunities for individuals to secure their functionings. For example, they may offer employment opportunities to enable single mothers to provide shelter, clothing, and food for their families. They may

consider their obligations fulfilled with the provision of this opportunity regardless of whether or not it is taken up. Such opportunities may, however, carry cross-functional risks for the beneficiaries. The well-being of the children may be jeopardized while the mother is at work, as might also be her capability to care for them and her feeling of self-esteem. What seems important is that opportunities presented by policy makers are reasonable for the recipients to take up, all things considered, and not simply theoretical or formal.

Incorporating these factors (interconnectivity of functionings, realistic nature of opportunities, and the risk to functioning security) is arguably the main revision to the capabilities approach presented in *Disadvantage* (Wolff and de-Shalit 2007): what matters for individuals is not only their level of functionings at any particular time, but also their genuine prospects for sustaining that level. On this reading, disadvantage is defined as the lack of genuine opportunities for secure functionings.

While the inclusion of risk to functionings in the Capability Approach increases its completeness, it also adds to its complexity, raising a further challenge to its effective application. Identifying the least advantaged seems even more difficult when functioning risk has to be included.

Clustering of disadvantage

How are we to compare the lack of genuine opportunity for one particular secure functioning with that of another? After a review of much empirical data the conclusion was reached that precise weightings may not matter because the most extreme disadvantage typically occurs when several disadvantages cluster together. One need only consider the homeless, with no employment prospects, little money, no family support network, and failing health to see how the least advantaged might be relatively deprived in several functionings. It matters less which is the most severe deprivation than that their cumulative impact be recognized and addressed. It follows that government policies might be considered successful if they reduce the clustering of disadvantages.

Amongst several studies that suggest that clustering of disadvantage is commonplace, the research of Michael Marmot, Richard Wilkinson and associates, on the social determinants of health, is particularly informative. This shows a clustering of several of the above-mentioned core functionings, specifically, life, health, affiliation, sense, imagination and thought, and control over one's environment. The research also stresses the importance of one's position in the social hierarchy in a relative rather than absolute sense. Marmot suggests that the functionings of affiliation and control over one's environment explain why hierarchies impact on health.

The lower in the hierarchy you are, the less likely it is that you will have full control over your life and opportunities for full social participation. Autonomy and social participation are so important for health that their lack leads to deterioration in health.

(Marmot 2004: 248)

Wilkinson and Marmot also suggest that unemployment (a component of "control over one's environment") clusters with other disadvantages, particularly the increased risk of premature death. They emphasize that this risk increases not only when people actually become unemployed but also when they sense the risk that they may lose their employment. This observation ties in closely with the earlier point about functioning security.

Accepting that clustering occurs, one might still question why disadvantages in separate functionings link together and persist or accumulate over time. The sequence of events in

which a person becomes unemployed, then homeless, and then friendless, and finally becomes ill, suggests a causal dynamic. However, it would be wrong to conclude from this that the clustering of disadvantage always starts with unemployment. What is reasonable to conclude is that clustering is dynamic and one functioning deficiency may well lead to another. Marmot and Wilkinson's research identifies some of those dynamic linkages, i.e., the social determinants of health, but one might conceive of alternative starting points for a cluster of disadvantage, including poor education or social discrimination. It seems likely that the dynamics of clustering may vary from one social group to another, and from one time to another, and that there is no fixed causal relation between one disadvantage and another. If this is the case, then the challenge for policy makers includes researching the prevailing clustering dynamics in their target population.

Declustering of disadvantage

If we accept that a key role of government policy makers is to identify the least advantaged and prioritize actions to reduce their disadvantage, then the evidence of clustering is doubly important. Not only does it suggest short cuts for identifying the least advantaged but it also raises possibilities for tackling the problem. By addressing one low functioning we might, through the interconnectivity of clustered functionings, positively impact further disadvantages. For example, policy makers could focus on "corrosive disadvantages," the presence of which triggers further disadvantages, and "fertile functionings," the securing of which can enhance further functionings. Indeed, one appeal of the latter is that an investment in fertile functionings is most efficiently rewarded with positive returns across a range of functionings.

Corrosive disadvantages and fertile functionings

Some might consider these two categories as two sides of the same coin, but the situation is not quite so simple. Take, for instance, the functioning of bodily integrity. Someone living in fear of bodily attack is open to a range of negative effects, including stress-related illness, and an unwillingness to go out to work or play. In this way the risk to bodily integrity can be classified as a corrosive disadvantage. However, the absence of that risk is not necessarily fertile. Similarly, if someone falls into drug addiction following the loss of employment, the provision of a new job may not be sufficient to end that addiction. Or, to use a well-known example, if someone is run over by a steam roller, the cure is not to reverse the engine back over him or her. In other words, finding a corrosive disadvantage is not the same as finding a fertile functioning jackpot. Nevertheless, identifying corrosive disadvantages and fertile functionings within a particular context is an important step, we would argue, on the path to reducing disadvantage. Corrosive disadvantages provide guidance for preventive action. If, for example, addiction to drugs or alcohol is a corrosive disadvantage, governments have good reason to identify and implement policies that make addiction less likely. By contrast, government should seek policies that encourage the development of fertile functionings.

In searching for catalytic functionings we should not limit ourselves to those six most central functionings identified earlier. Rather, we are looking for variables that impact on those core functionings. These may be what otherwise might be considered minor functionings, or components of functionings, or even preconditions for functionings. Investigations in this field are far from complete but existing research has suggested three promising candidates: affiliation, education, and poverty.

Affiliation

It is unclear to some whether poverty (low income) causes lack of affiliation or vice versa, or if indeed both causal paths are equally strong. However, in the interviews conducted for *Disadvantage*, the participants identified *affiliation* as amongst the most fertile of functionings. They reported that those who experience a high degree of affiliation are better equipped to cope with threats and risks to their other functionings. One reason offered to support this view is that those with strong affiliations enjoy higher self-esteem and feel more self-assured in their dealings with authorities. Indeed, some claimed that “affiliation was the best means to achieve empowerment.” There is also evidence to suggest that lack of affiliation can be corrosive. Typical of such feedback was the example of one interviewee who told of his growing up in the close-knit slums of post-war London. Although deprived of indoor bathrooms and the like, his family benefited from strong community bonds. Unfortunately when they were moved to “improved” housing in newly built tower blocks, that sense of community and mutual dependence was lost, partly as a result of less communal space, and his family eventually became unemployed and homeless. In another interview within the same research a social worker claimed that the most important functioning for elderly people was a sense of affiliation because it could help them cope with everything else. Such cases give support to the view that affiliation can be both a corrosive disadvantage and a fertile functioning. If that view is correct, then measures that encourage affiliation could also be very helpful in addressing other forms of disadvantage. Such steps could include building clubs for the targeted people to meet and improving town planning to ensure adequate local facilities such as shops, community centers, and sports facilities.

Education

Many would probably accept that providing better education, part of *sense, imagination, and thought*, would be key to addressing other functionings and therefore an important fertile functioning. For those, the evidence regarding education can be surprising. For example, the European Social Survey suggests the correlation between education and how satisfied people are with their lives is not statistically significant. However, life satisfaction may not be the most appropriate factor for our analysis, and other indications, such as the reported correlation between education and health, suggest education is after all an important fertile functioning. While this fertility may be difficult to prove in all contexts, there is strong evidence that lacking education is frequently a corrosive disadvantage, often through its impact on employment. Research suggests that, typically, the lower one’s education, the lower one’s chance of finding employment, particularly a well-rewarded and interesting position.

In this sense, education is not limited to the standard academic subjects or even the three Rs, but extends to include what are often called the soft skills. These include communication skills (essential for any interview or job application), social skills (essential for negotiating), and parenting skills. Shortcomings in any of these areas can negatively influence one’s sense of autonomy and control over one’s environment. Indeed, it is easy to visualize how underdeveloped soft skills might be a corrosive disadvantage. Whether it is also a fertile functioning might depend upon the context and the skill levels of others.

Poverty

It is still commonplace for many people to associate disadvantage with poverty in the sense of low income. They hold that if the incomes of the poor were increased then they would be able to afford to buy many of the things they need. They don’t necessarily believe that the increased

money would “compensate” for other disadvantages but merely that it would help cope with those disadvantages. However, there are arguments against a focus of raising incomes. Robert E. Lane (2000) has provided evidence that, once one is beyond the poverty level, a larger income contributes almost nothing to happiness. But again, happiness and adequate functioning may be quite different matters. Furthermore, the risk of being inadequately funded may be a serious problem for “control over one’s environment,” even for those well above whatever poverty line one applies. This in turn can lead to people taking risks with other functionings. Insecurity of income can thus be a corrosive disadvantage, even though being affluent may not necessarily be a fertile functioning.

One might think that the corrosive nature of income poverty would be enough to justify an increase in income for all parties below some recognized threshold, but research by Susan Mayer (1998) indicates that some caution is required. She has expressed the view that increasing the incomes of the long-term poor is likely to lead to increased spending on consumer goods rather than, for example, the types of cultural activities that could lead to improved educational outcomes for their children. Supporting this view, one interviewee suggested that people invest for the long term when they have a positive experience of progress over time (Wolff and de-Shalit 2007: 149). However, the poor have not had such an experience. In fact their experience is more likely to have been that they stand to lose in future whatever they currently have. On this view it is better to consume quickly on holidays and celebrations before the good luck goes away. Whether this explanation is correct is open to debate but it remains a worry that lack of a secure income is a corrosive disadvantage, and that the simple solution of providing more money may not be as fertile as first assumed.

Nevertheless, income poverty can join education and affiliation as key areas for focus whenever policy makers explore their communities for the key levers to decluster disadvantage.

Policies for declustering disadvantage

One might imagine from this that the solution to disadvantage would simply be the provision by government of resources, structures, and opportunities to identify and create fertile functionings and remove corrosive disadvantages. But such a conclusion overlooks a vital component: the importance of the active involvement of the recipients in their emergence from disadvantage. The motivation levels of such individuals will have a major bearing on that involvement and on the efficacy of targeted resources, structures, and opportunities. Consequently, any approach to policy making should place considerable emphasis on factors affecting the motivation of intended beneficiaries.

The psychologists Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, and their numerous collaborators, have conducted extensive empirical research into human motivation and well-being. Their SDT holds that motivation is dependent upon the satisfaction of basic psychological needs to develop skills and capacities, to act on one’s own accord, and to connect to others and the environment. Ryan and Deci refer to these needs as competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Research has shown that people become amotivated when their needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness are thwarted (Boggiano 1998). SDT also predicts that fluctuations in the satisfaction of the three needs will directly predict fluctuations in psychological well-being. Furthermore, it predicts that each of the three needs is necessary for optimal human development so that none can be neglected without negative consequences. “Psychological health requires satisfaction of all three needs, one or two are not enough” (Deci and Ryan 2000: 228).

Unlike bodily needs, such as hunger, that persist over time, the neglect of psychological needs can lead to the accommodation of substitute fulfillments with significant psychological costs. For example, if the need for relatedness is thwarted when an individual is young, that person might compensate by attempting to improve her sense of worth by accumulating money or possessions. However, this replacement goal can interfere with the attainment of her real need for relatedness, triggering further psychological costs (Deci and Ryan 2000: 248). Unfortunately, this implies that the least advantaged may have suffered damage that is not easily repaired by the correction of the original component disadvantages.

It is interesting to note the similarity between Deci and Ryan's work and Marmot's epidemiology, mentioned earlier. Marmot's work suggests that poor social networks (relatedness in SDT terms), low control over one's life (autonomy in SDT terms), and poor education (part of competence in SDT terms) will lead to poor outcomes in terms of the secure functionings of health and life. By comparison, Deci and Ryan specify that their three needs are essential for psychological growth, integrity, and well-being.

It is also possible to map the SDT needs to the central functionings on Nussbaum's list:

- Relatedness: 5 Emotions
- 7 Affiliation
- 8 Other species, and possibly
- 9 Play

- Competence: 4 Sense, imagination, and thought (including education)

- Autonomy: 6 Practical reason
- 10 Control over one's environment

Finally, if we refer to the six most central functionings identified from the interview process discussed earlier, and set aside the three somatic functionings, life, bodily health, and bodily integrity, we are left with:

- Affiliation
- Control over one's environment
- Sense, imagination, and thought

The first two of these seem very close to the SDT needs of relatedness and autonomy, and the third bears a reasonable resemblance to competence. Leaving aside the accepted differences between the terminology of functionings and needs, the apparent congruence is interesting and informative. For example, SDT suggests that the non-somatic functionings (numbers 4–10 on Nussbaum's list) may be important not only for their direct contribution to well-being but also for their impact on psychological growth and motivation. This raises the possibility that the fertility or otherwise of a particular functioning in a given context may be influenced by its contribution to an individual's motivation. Indeed, motivation may be a key to fertile functionings.

The purpose of introducing SDT at this point is not simply to draw support for the philosophical view of disadvantage presented here but also because of its extensive practical application in the field of policy making. Ryan and Deci, working with numerous colleagues, have researched the application of SDT in various fields, including:

- education;
- environmental sustainability;
- health care;
- organizational behavior;
- sports, exercise and physical education.²

A common thread running through much of this research is the positive role of autonomy support. For example, it has been reported that long-term medication adherence is substantially a function of patient autonomy, which is promoted by prescriber autonomy support.³ Similar linkages to autonomy support have been found in the fields of weight-loss treatment and substance abuse management. A general conclusion drawn from these and other studies is that, “When patients have their psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness supported in the process of their health care, they experience more volitional engagement in treatment and maintain outcomes better over time” (Ryan et al. 2008).

This, of course, prompts the question of how these psychological needs are to be supported. Regarding autonomy support, Ryan and Deci place emphasis on three elements: real choice for the recipient, clear rationales for the options, and full engagement with the recipients’ feelings and perspective. Key to this support is that the choices on offer allow values and interests to be engaged and expressed without any pressure and without excessive options. It is less clear, perhaps, to see how real choice can be incorporated into policies designed to reduce disadvantage. However, awareness of the consequences of being overly prescriptive may help in the design of such initiatives. This observation clearly resonates with the earlier observation that, in some cases, what matters for well-being is not whether people have the choice to achieve, or not achieve, a functioning, but rather having choices that allow them to achieve a functioning in their own particular way.

Turning to relatedness (affiliation) support, and competence (sense imagination and thought) support, it is possible to see how the SDT view might reinforce our philosophical introspections. If we step back and consider what determines an individual’s genuine opportunities for secure functionings, we find three key dimensions: internal resources, external resources, and the social and material structure. The structure determines the rules of the game and the resources represent the tools for playing the game. Internal resources include natural abilities and aptitudes but also education and skills training, including soft skills. External resources in this context include available funds and access to facilities and equipment. The social structure includes the laws and customs of the society, formal power relations, and cultural and other social norms. Consequently there are many entry points for possible actions that a policy maker might consider. Amongst these, perhaps the most obvious is the provision of financial benefits to compensate or help offset a particular disadvantage. Nevertheless, leaving aside cases where financial compensation is completely inappropriate, the provision of such benefits can bring unwanted problems. For example, if the benefit is designed to target specific groups of people, then being part of such a group may stigmatize the intended beneficiaries. The process of claiming one’s entitlement may bring shame to the individual or cause a social division between the claimers and the providers. SDT provides a framework for better understanding why selective financial benefits may be counterproductive: they undermine one’s relations with the rest of society (relatedness), and they undermine one’s sense of control over the environment (autonomy). The alternative of providing universal benefits, such as child benefits paid to all mothers, gets around these difficulties by avoiding the socially divisive selection process. However, the high cost of universal benefits makes them an inefficient tool for many problems and would draw resistance from those who seek to minimize redistribution.

If we conclude from this that cash compensation is not the best way to increase an individual's opportunities for secure functioning, we need to look elsewhere within the spectrum of internal resources, external resources, and social and material structure. One such approach, identified in *Disadvantage*, seeks to strengthen social connections rather than divide them. The thought is that governments should develop opportunities for people to meet and establish social connections. This could include rethinking the use of public spaces, improving public transport, and providing subsidies for evening classes and clubs. Not only would this be a benefit to those needing to increase their circle of contacts, or at risk of needing such support, but it would also strengthen society as a whole. Governments would not always need to shoulder the whole cost of setting up and maintaining such facilities but merely provide the seeds for local social groups to nurture. Increasing opportunities in this way might be termed a status enhancement, a beneficial change to the social and material structure with the potential for individuals to increase their internal resources—both hard and soft skills. Through the SDT lens such a proposal appears sound in that it supports the need for relatedness, in providing increased opportunities to meet and work with new contacts, it supports the need for competence, in that it allows people to pursue or develop their skills and interests, and it supports the need for autonomy, in providing a choice for individuals but with no pressure to participate. In this way the targeted groups might be motivated to engage with others in their efforts to emerge from disadvantage.

As the months passed following the 2013 flooding in Yalding and the rest of the UK, a number of government policies emerged. Some new barrages were proposed, further dredging in certain areas, even talk of council tax rebates to fund improved home defenses. For people affected by recent floods or at risk from future floods all such measures may seem helpful. However, many of these individuals would not fall into our category of the disadvantaged. Despite the tremendous inconvenience, financial cost, and emotional upset that a flood can bring, many of the victims are sufficiently resilient to recover from the setback. However, there will be some unfortunate individuals for whom a flood or risk of flood is a sufficient knock to their *bodily health* functioning (including adequate shelter) to tip them into the category of least advantaged. Their cluster of disadvantages may have become so significant that they require the attention and support of government agencies. For such people the best solution may not be a new barrage somewhere upstream from their location, or the like, but rather a set of policies that address the other components of their cluster of disadvantage. Issues like floods and storms and other natural disasters demonstrate the difficulties faced by governments in allocating scarce resources for the maximum benefit of society, particularly under the glare of an attentive media. The approach to understanding disadvantage discussed here together with the guidance for policy making supported by SDT should assist those tasked with this difficult challenge.

Further reading

- Nussbaum, M.C. (2000) *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
(Nussbaum's highly influential book on the Capabilities Approach.)
- Sen, A. (1980) "Equality of What?" In S.M. McMurrin (ed.), *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 195–220.
(Sen's classic essay on the Capability Approach.)
- Wolff, J. (2009) "Disadvantage, Risk and the Social Determinants of Health," *Public Health Ethics*, 2(3), 214–223.
(How the social determinants of health might be used in the analysis of disadvantage.)

Wolff, J. (2011) *Ethics and Public Policy: A Philosophical Inquiry*. Oxon: Routledge.
(A philosophical assessment of central problems and controversies in public policy.)

Notes

- 1 For a recent complete list, see Nussbaum (2011: 33–34).
- 2 See <http://www.selfdeterminationtheory.org/publications> for a comprehensive listing.
- 3 Williams, Rodin, Ryan, Grolnick, and Deci (1998) “Autonomous Regulation and Long-Term Medication Adherence in Adult Outpatients,” referenced in Ryan *et al.* (2008).

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