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**Thesis abstract**

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Title of thesis The Capabilities Approach: A Hermeneutical Inquiry of Its Potential in Basic Education			
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Abstract <p>This Master's thesis concerns the enhancement of human capabilities and well-being in the context of basic education, raising two main questions: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Capabilities Approach as a theory of well-being? and What is basic education's institutional potential and significance in the operationalization of the approach? This hermeneutical inquiry demonstrates an interpretative reading of Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach. Its comparisons to other theories of well-being and the assessment of its potential for basic education are conducted by close hermeneutical reading and interpretation of research literature, where Nussbaum's writings are perceived as the primary data of the thesis.</p> <p>The approach is viewed as a counter-theoretical paradigm addressing the capabilities of individuals, yet calling for equal opportunities and shared institutional responsibility. In this thesis the human capabilities are conceptualized as various doings and beings. They are freedoms to achieve alternative 'functionings', stemming from a combination of personal abilities and social, political and economic environment. The philosophical influences of the approach are introduced in the theoretical articulations of this thesis. Most importantly, the Aristotelian idea of 'eudaimonia' and Rawls's Theory of Justice are illuminated. The approach is also mirrored in its relation to global human rights movement and equity, proposed as underlying values of the Capabilities Approach.</p> <p>It is suggested that the approach's potential significance for the institute of basic education is remarkable and open for further study. The educational operationalization of the approach is discussed mostly with the help of Pedagogy of Care, and Human Rights education. It is proposed that the Capabilities Approach should be viewed on multiple levels of basic education; in school policies, on a classroom level and on curricular level. On a more structural, socio-developmental level, basic education is seen as a powerful institution with opportunities towards social change and enhancement of human well-being.</p>			
Keywords Capabilities approach, basic education, hermeneutics, well-being, capability			



**Kasvatustieteiden tiedekunta**

**Tiivistelmä opinnäytetyöstä**

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Tiivistelmä <p>Tämä tutkimus käsittelee inhimillisen kyvykkyyden ja hyvinvoinnin edistämistä perusopetuksen kontekstissa. Ongelmaa lähestytään kahden pääkysymyksen kautta; ensinnäkin, mitkä ovat kyvykkyysteorian vahvuudet ja heikkoudet hyvinvointiteorianä? Toisekseen, mikä on perusopetuksen institutionaalinen potentiaali ja merkitys teorian käytännöllistämässä? Tutkimuksessa tulkitaan Martha Nussbaumin kyvykkyysteoriaa hermeneuttisen metodologian näkökulmasta. Teorian vertautuvuutta suhteessa muihin hyvinvointiteorioihin ja sen potentiaalia perusopetuksessa arvioidaan ensisijaisen aineiston – Nussbaumin tutkimuksen – hermeneuttisen lukemisen ja tulkinnan keinoin.</p> <p>Kyvykkyysteoria nähdään vaihtoehtoparadigmana, joka korostaa yksilön kyvykkyyttä vaatien samalla tasavertaisia mahdollisuuksia ja instituutioiden vastuuta. Tässä tutkimuksessa kyvykkyydet määritellään erilaisina tekemisinä ja olemisina. Ne ovat vapauksia saavuttaa vaihtoehtoisia 'toimimisia', jotka riippuvat toisaalta henkilökohtaisista kyvyistä, toisaalta sosiaalisesta, poliittisesta ja taloudellisesta ympäristöstä. Tutkimuksessa esitellään teorian filosofiset vaikutteet, joista tärkeimmiksi nostetaan aristotelelainen <i>eudemonian</i> idea sekä Rawlsin oikeudenmukaisuusteoria. Teoriaa peilataan myös suhteessa globaalin ihmisoikeusliikkeeseen ja yhdenvertaisuusajatteluun, joita ehdotetaan teorian arvolähtökohdiksi.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa esitetään, että kyvykkyysteorian potentiaalinen merkitys perusopetukselle instituutiona on merkittävä, ja aihe on hedelmällinen jatkotutkimuksen kannalta. Teorian käytännöllistämistä kasvatuksessa tutkitaan lähinnä välittämisen pedagogiikkaa ja ihmisoikeuskasvatusta apuna käyttäen. Tutkimuksen lopputulemana ehdotetaan, että kyvykkyysteorian pitäisi näkyä perusopetuksen useilla tasoilla; koulujen käytänteissä, luokkatasolla sekä opetussuunnitelman tasolla. Rakenteellisemmalla sosiaalisen kehityksen tasolla perusopetus nähdään hyvinvointiin ja sosiaaliseen muutokseen voimakkaasti vaikuttavana instituutiona.</p>			
Asiasanat Kyvykkyysteoria, kyvykkyys, perusopetus, hermeneutiikka, hyvinvointi			



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## 1 Introduction

This piece of research is a Master's thesis concerning the enhancement of human capabilities and well-being in the context of basic education. The thesis is a hermeneutical inquiry, and it demonstrates an interpretative reading of Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach by comparing it to other theories of well-being and assessing its potential regarding basic education as an institution.

This thesis is a qualitative theoretical inquiry in which hermeneutic research approach is utilized. In Chapter 2, a more detailed account of this choice of the prevailing methodology of the thesis will be provided. In addition, some of the general characteristics and considerations of a qualitative research, as well as epistemological starting points of the thesis, will be discussed. The thesis follows the hermeneutical tradition of reading, re-reading, interpreting and analyzing of a theory. This will be done by close examination of research literature, where Martha Nussbaum's writings on the Capability Approach is perceived as the primary data of the research. The interpretative nature of the methodology is made visible in the structure of the thesis. As the capabilities literature is the primary data of the thesis, rather long quotations from the original texts appear in this text. Thus, it is made possible for the reader to compare the author's interpretation and the text of the original source. The theoretical core of the thesis entails definitions of the re-occurring concepts related to the topic, familiarization with the philosophical influences of the approach, and comparisons of the approach to other theories of well-being.

The Capabilities Approach can be seen as a counter-theoretical paradigm aiming towards a good life, addressing the capabilities of individuals, yet loudly calling for equal opportunities, shared institutional responsibility and the collective 'good'. In this thesis the capabilities are conceptualized and defined, by following Nussbaum's and Amartya Sen's example, and as their most simple form, they are viewed as various doings and beings. Human capabilities are types of freedoms to achieve alternative functionings; they are not merely abilities inside a person but also freedoms and opportunities stemming from a combination of personal abilities and social, political and economic environment (Nussbaum, 2011. p. 20).

Even though a modern view, the Capabilities Approach and the intuitive ideas that lie behind it have a long history and their roots in many different cultures. Even at the level of

philosophical theory, the approach has many sources. These philosophical influences are introduced and examined in this thesis. The most important influences of Nussbaum's version of the Capabilities Approach are philosophic works from ancient Greece and Rome, and John Rawls's work. Aristotelian ideas, especially the concept of eudaimonia, 'good life', will be illuminated, as well as Rawls's Theory of Justice, and its significance to the Capabilities Approach, will be included in the theoretical articulations of this thesis.

The global development agenda and battling social injustices are visible in the research literature of this thesis. Thus, the social-justice seeking value-base of the Capabilities Approach is illustrated when philosophical influences of the approach are introduced. Global human rights movement and different equality theories also stem from Aristotelian ethics, which makes it meaningful to mirror the approach in its relation to global human rights and equity, and propose these as the underlying values of the Capabilities Approach.

It is suggested in this thesis that the Capabilities Approach's potential significance for basic education, and vice versa, is remarkable and open for further study. The implementation of the approach in education is discussed mostly in the light of Nel Noddings's Pedagogy of Care, and in relation to Human Rights education. Basic education is seen as an institution that has a role and potential in promoting and enabling human capabilities, well-being and equity. It is proposed that the Capabilities Approach would be viewed on multiple levels of basic education; in school policies, on a classroom level and on curricular level. Additionally, on a more structural, socio-developmental level, basic education is seen as a powerful institution with opportunities towards social change. Interestingly, it is suggested that unlike many institutions, education can be seen as both as this sort of an external, enabling factor in developing of human capabilities, but also, in the micro level context of education (schooling), it has potential in the development of individual innate capabilities.

Even though the nature of this hermeneutical inquiry of the theory of the Capabilities Approach is highly interpretative, it is claimed that the research is not all subjective and has potential wider significance. The Capabilities Approach is viewed as a necessary counter-paradigm urgently needed in today's globalizing world with severe social-injustices. Its relevance and operationalization has been researched on diverse academic fields, but not yet extensively in the context of education. As the architects of the approach call for institutions' responsibility in the implementation of the approach, it is the aim of this thesis to



build an understanding of the approach and propose basic education as one of the most powerful institutions for change and the enhancement of human well-being.

The following figure illustrates the different influencing factors in my hermeneutical, theoretical inquiry. The black circle in the middle symbolizes my primary research questions, or the aim of my research which is the construed understanding of the Capabilities Approach, and its potential significance and applicability in the context of basic education.

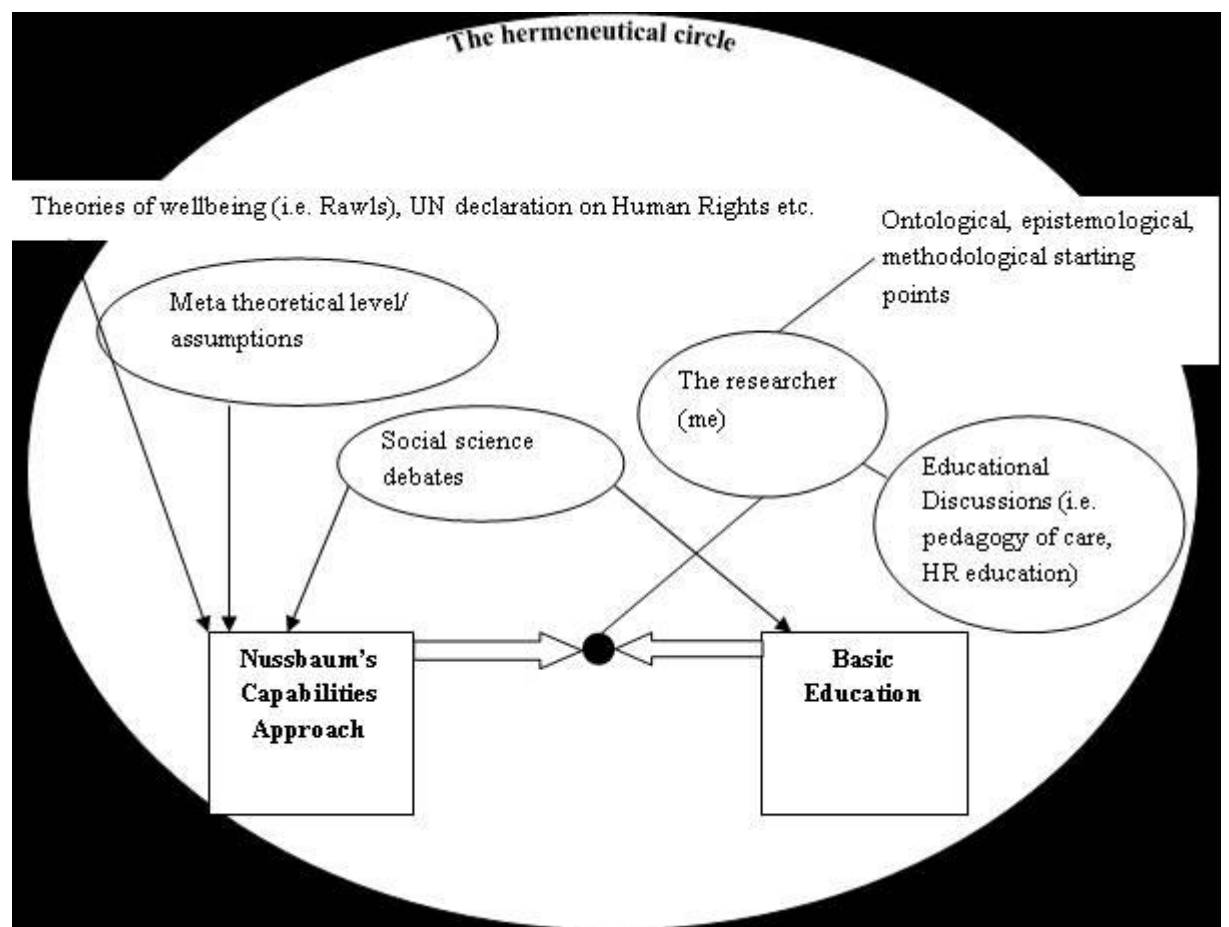


Figure 1: Influencing factors

As explained earlier, in this thesis I intend to interpret and deepen my understanding of the Capabilities Approach and the related concepts and the socio-scientific debates around it. Additionally, I will explore its significance to basic education, and vice versa, focusing on how the Capabilities Approach could be present in basic education, and how basic educa-

tion could enhance the development of central human capabilities. Therefore, the main research questions addressed in this thesis are:

1. According to the researcher's reading, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the Capabilities Approach as a theory of well-being?
2. What are the challenges and possibilities of the Capabilities Approach in relation to basic education as an institution, and vice versa?

In relation to the former research question, the following sub-questions have been constructed in order to answer and examine the first main research question:

- How are the capabilities defined, and what are the philosophical influences and the values behind the Capabilities Approach?
- How is well-being or 'happiness' defined in relation to the Capabilities Approach?
- How does the Capabilities Approach relate to the other theories of well-being?
- What are the main criticisms posed towards the Capabilities Approach?

As for the structure of this thesis, the next chapter includes the epistemological and methodological considerations of this piece of research. In Chapter 3, the Capabilities Approach, some of its history, starting points and developments will be introduced. The relevant concept of a capability will also be clarified. Additionally, the philosophical influences of the approach are shortly described, as well as the Capabilities Approach's relation to other theories of wellbeing and its links to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In Chapter 4, I shall ponder on the approach's applicability in the context of basic education. Then, I will move on and summarize some suggested strengths and weaknesses of the approach, present some of the most salient criticisms posed towards it, and finally, will introduce the debate around the operationalization of the approach.

## 2 Methodological Starting Points

Epistemological questions concern with the nature of knowledge. In my research, there is an epistemological dilemma, that throughout my research process I have had to come to terms with. The Capabilities Approach attempts to work as a universally applicable, meaningful well-being theory and a philosophical approach, and I also interpret it as such. However, this raises some cultural and relative criticism towards it, and poses epistemological questions about the reality, the world and universal well-being.

When it comes to the nature of knowledge, if the reality is regarded as something that exists outside the human being, it implies that knowledge of this reality can be acquired by measuring it in some way. Were this the case, the researcher would be the objective observer who might be able to find the ‘truth’ that exists somewhere out in the reality. This viewpoint towards the nature of knowledge has also been referred to as the positivist stance. On the other hand, reality can also be viewed as something that is negotiated and constructed between people, and something that might have different meanings to different individuals. In a case such as this, the subjectivity of the researcher is recognized by the researcher her/himself, and the idea that knowledge of the world could somehow be attained objectively is rejected altogether. (Cohen & Manion, 1994. p. 6)

In my research, I lean towards the post-positivist, or anti-positivist tradition similarly to many social scientists and also capabilities theorists. The underlying thesis here is that when researching human beings, and their well-being for instance, the researcher cannot expect to discover ‘true’ or objective information. That is to say, the researcher’s position is not the one of an objective by-stander, who merely observes ‘reality’ as it happens (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 26) The contextuality, the researcher’s understanding of the concepts and the interpretation have a central role in the research process which links together with my methodological approach, hermeneutics.

Furthermore, and precisely due to the fact that interpretation and my reading of the capabilities theory have such a crucial role in this research, the researcher’s individual consciousness and reasoning are at the heart of epistemological considerations of this thesis. My own starting points, beliefs and schemas for reasoning have a great impact on, what knowledge – the assessment of the Capabilities Approach – is in this research. However, as Resnick (1991) points out, these individual schemas are not strictly individual construc-

tions, but quite the opposite. They are strongly influenced by the beliefs and reasoning schemas available in the individuals' surrounding culture. (Resnick, 1991. pp. 7-8). The factors that influence individual consciousness and schemas for reasoning have been addressed rather similarly by many researchers. For instance, the outline of the formation of individual consciousness that Vygotsky created could be represented in the following way: "first, collective activity, then culture, the ideal, sign or symbol, and finally individual consciousness." (Davydov 1995, as cited in Hedegaard & al. 1999, p. 15).

Human beings' individuality is also discussed by a Finnish researcher Lauri Rauhala (1983, 1989), who introduces a concept of situationality in the human ontology. For Rauhala the 'situation' refers to a position of an individual that has been constructed by cultural, social, biological etc. factors (either chosen or pre-determined), and this situation constructs a subject position for an individual, determining how a person perceives the world and processes information (Rauhala, 1983, pp. 33-38; 1989, pp. 14-19). This issue of situationality also needs to be kept in mind when we consider issues such as well-being, what is good for people, caring, empathy, capabilities, and other key concepts and themes of my research. The researcher's own 'situation', in other words, starting points and their impact on the research cannot be avoided, nor should they be overlooked.

This all sounds highly subjective, and brings us to the epistemological dilemma related to my thesis and my research topic. If there is no such thing as universal, or shared conception of knowledge, truth or 'the good', it creates difficulties to the implementation of a rather universal well-being approach. As Carr (1998) also points out:

*"...the main conclusion of recent international and cross-cultural dialogue seems to have been that there can be no common theoretical or practical discourse enshrining cross culturally applicable canons of rationality, knowledge and truth. This, in a nutshell, is the position and the predicament which has come to be labelled 'postmodern'; moreover, it hardly requires present emphasis that it is a position with potentially devastating consequences for education and educationalists – not least those required to operate in the increasingly multi-cultural or value pluralist circumstances..."*

(Carr, 1998. pp. 3-4)

Carr's observation on postmodernism, and the tricky scenario this position poses for instance for educationalists, is rather interesting. It is the attempt of my thesis to conduct a theoretical inquiry and to a certain extent, an assessment of the Capabilities Approach and its possible operationalization in the context of formal basic education. Thus, even though I epistemologically by no means suggest that there is objective truth somewhere out there for researchers to be discovered, or that the whole of the world could arrive to a consensus on the operationalization of the Capabilities Approach, I still hold that human capability deprivation and global social injustice are too important issues to be left untouched because of the relative, post-modern impasse.

This thesis is a qualitative theoretical inquiry in which I have decided to utilize the hermeneutic research approach. In the following, this choice of the prevailing methodology of the thesis is discussed, as well as some of the general characteristics and considerations of a qualitative research.

Based on the starting points of my study and my research questions, it seems rather obvious that the nature of my research is of a qualitative one. It would prove to be quite impossible to reach a conclusion and to answer the research questions by quantitative data analysis methods. Creswell (2007, pp. 39-40), indeed, suggests that a qualitative approach is suitable for a research in which the objective is to explore a topic or themes throughout the course of the research and to analyse it by qualitative means, instead of measuring it quantitatively.

My choice of hermeneutical research approach can be viewed somewhat natural because, most importantly, I am interpreting a theory, and trying to form an understanding of a theory and its possible relevance for basic education. I plan to follow the hermeneutic tradition of analysing, re-analysing, and interpreting the theory based on my previous knowledge and pre-conceptions. Generally speaking, hermeneutics refers to the theory and practice of interpreting. The term hermeneutics originates from the Greek word *hermeneuein*, which translated into English means to understand or to interpret (Patton, 2002, pp. 113-114). I study the Capabilities Approach in a hermeneutical sense – by building my interpretation of the theory and its philosophical influences, and reflecting upon it in the light of related social science debates and other well-being theories. My research has been a process of finding out what the capabilities actually mean to Nussbaum, how they are viewed by other researchers (such as Sen and Kurstak) and what is my understanding of them (processes,

aims, goals, intrinsic values?). I am also interested in the potential significance the Capabilities Approach could have in basic education, and as we go in circles, vice versa.

Heidegger took hermeneutics even further by researching the meaning of being. He also introduced the circle of understanding by explaining that reaching an understanding of being is an indefinite process, where a phenomenon is first presented in an ambiguous form combined with the past knowledge and experiences, that later on shape a concept of the phenomenon. This understanding of the phenomenon then guides the concept forming of future experiences, creating a continuous circle that expands endlessly to generate further knowledge and comprehension. Heidegger's circle is known as the hermeneutic circle. (Patton, 2002, p. 114)

Re-evaluating and re-developing one's hypothesis, proposition, or the pre-understanding, thus, clarifies why it is said that in hermeneutics the interpretations are never complete. As hermeneutical approach has its cyclical character, it becomes clear that one's interpretations are never absolute (Patton, 2002, p. 115; Siljander, 1998, p. 117). Actually, modern hermeneutics challenges the previously mentioned positivist ambition to reach the absolute truth, and therefore emphasizes the importance of an interpretation remaining, exactly, an interpretation within the context. In fact, researchers using hermeneutic approach are argued to be more transparent about their role in the research, as they tend to be "much clearer about the fact that they are constructing the 'reality' on the basis of their interpretations of data" (Patton, 2002, p. 115). Thus, it is vital in hermeneutics that the researchers declare their position and purposes in a clear and precise manner (ibid.).

It is obvious that the methodological nature of hermeneutics is highly subjective, and that, to a great extent, the results depend on the researchers' position. Eichelberger (1989, as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 115) indeed points out that

*"If other researchers had different backgrounds, used different methods, or had different purposes, they would likely develop different types of reactions, focus on different aspects of the setting, and develop somewhat different scenarios."*

This citation clearly links back to Rauhala's situational view of the human being, and again underlines the fact that researchers as humans are tied to their situation that strongly affects our thinking, and hence our research. Heidegger referred to the starting points, pre-understandings and pre-existing structures. These, indeed, form our interpretations as researchers, and therefore bring forward our own views and understandings of the phenomenon, a philosophy or, in the case of this thesis, a paradigm or a theory. Even though subjectivity should be attempted to be diminished – for instance, by examining the research topic from various viewpoints – in hermeneutics, subjectivity persists as omnipresent. It is impossible to avoid, since it is such a fundamental part of the hermeneutical approach. My researcher's position as well as some of the ethical considerations of the research and the methodology shall be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 that concerns the trustworthiness of the research.

Conclusively, it could be noted that in this research, hermeneutics is seen as both an epistemological and as a methodological starting point, since the role of interpretation becomes so crucial. As has already been established, to me it seems that the interpretative nature of this theoretical inquiry goes hand in hand with the starting points of the research. I have chosen to draw from the theory, social science debates, my previous studies and professional development, literature, as they have been the most influential and useful ways for me to construct my knowledge and understanding of any phenomenon to do with education or the world in general. Next, the research material and the most influential literature to this thesis will be introduced in more detail.

This thesis is a form of a hermeneutical analysis of Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach in the context of human well-being and basic education. In this thesis, several theorists and researchers are mentioned and several literacy sources utilized while the Capabilities Approach, as a sort of a counter-paradigm for well-being, is studied and analyzed. I am limiting the focus of the examination mainly on Martha Nussbaum's version of the Capabilities Theory to such a great extent that Nussbaum's writings could be said to be the main data of this Master's thesis. The single most important piece of work is her recent account *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (2011). Along with this, I am examining her numerous earlier articles in different publications.

Aristotle and John Rawls are viewed and studied as philosophical influences. Amartya Sen, the architect of the Capabilities Approach, and Nussbaum's long-term academic colleague,

is introduced and discussed in terms of his influence to the Capabilities paradigm and Nussbaum's theory as it exists today. Daniel Kurstak's work, *From Capabilities to a Comprehensive Theory of Good: Universal Operationalization of the Capabilities Approach* (2013), has been used as a tool for analysis and interpretation, since he has researched, evaluated and assessed the Capabilities Approach very recently in great detail. Nel Noddings's work on Pedagogy of Care and critical pedagogy have been studied as education research literature. They have a role of possible implemenations and further 'back-up' for Nussbaum's approach in the context of basic education.

Even further literature has been studied for this thesis while construing and understanding of the capabilities theory. This type of literature has had more of a referential role, there have been sources that I have visited while in search of a definition, or while familiarizing myself with concepts related to my research topic. However, all of the works mentioned above have had a more important methodological role in the process of reading and re-reading, constructing understanding and interpretation.



### 3 The Capabilities Approach

*“The ethical-political theory referred to as the capabilities approach has experienced huge growth over the past quarter century, motivated initially by a number of perceived drawbacks in existing resourcist and welfarist approaches to human development, ethical analysis and policy planning, as well as by Aristotelian and Marxian conceptions of the good life, recognized as authentic goals worthy of collective pursuit.”*

(Kurstak, 2013, p. 4)

*“Capabilities Approach is the counter-theory we need, in an era of urgent human problems and unjustifiable human inequalities.”*

(Nussbaum, 2011. p. xii)

The extracts above are taken from Daniel Kurstak’s book, *From Capabilities to a Comprehensive Theory of the Good: Universal Operationalization of the Capabilities Approach*, and Martha Nussbaum’s book, *Creating Capabilities: the human development approach*, two of the main literary sources of this thesis. I wanted to have these quotations here as, to me, they enlighten and summarize the recent development, the ethical, socio-scientific background, as well as the main idea of the Capabilities Approach. This approach can be seen as a counter-theoretical paradigm aiming towards a good life, and even though it talks about the capabilities of individuals, it is loudly calling for equal opportunities, shared institutional responsibility and the collective ‘good’.

The Capabilities Approach or the *Capability Approach*, is sometimes also referred to as *The Human Development Approach*, *The Capabilities Theory* or, by Kurstak (2013), the *Foundational Project*. Nussbaum, who I hold as the main capability theorist in this thesis, prefers to use the term ‘Capabilities Approach’(with capital letters) because she is concerned with the capabilities of nonhuman animals as well, and additionally wants to use the plural to emphasize that the elements of people’s quality of life are “plural and qualitatively distinct” (Nussbaum, 2011. p. 18).

In the following, I shall introduce the Capabilities Approach, some of its history, starting points and developments. The relevant concept of a capability will also be clarified. Addi-

tionally, the philosophical influences of the approach are shortly described, as well as the Capabilities Approach's relation to other theories of wellbeing and its links to the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for instance. Topics such as suggested strengths and weaknesses of the approach, some of the most salient criticisms posed towards it, and the debate around its operationalization (the applicability of the approach in basic education, in particular) are referred to, but discussed further in chapters 4 and 5. In this chapter, I attempt to articulate my constructed understanding of the theoretical and conceptual framework of the Capabilities Approach.

### **3.1 Development: From the GDP criticism to a comprehensive theory of the good**

According to my current understanding, the starting point of this entire paradigm, the Capabilities Approach, has been strongly affected by the realization that Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fails to reflect human welfare accurately and truthfully. In the light of the capabilities literature I have studied for my thesis, it appears to me that this realization was also a strong motivating factor in the work of the first architect and the pioneer of the approach, Nobel Prize Laureate Amartya Sen, who has originally developed the approach in the early 1980s. Sen got the prize for welfare economics, but furthermore, he has made large contributions to development economics. He has also conducted research on the history and causes of famines, in addition to being a campaigner for moral causes, such as basic freedoms and capabilities, human rights and the guarantee of minimum living standards (Basu & Kanbur, 2009. p. 1).

Since the beginning of the 1980s, the approach has seen significant further developments. Authors, commentators, critics, and new capability theorists have contributed, and it seems to me that I have been familiarizing myself with an entire 'new-school' field of research when it comes to well-being and development. The most recognizable researcher in the literature that I have read, and also the most influential theorist to the topic of this thesis, is Martha Nussbaum. Nussbaum has an impressive list of works across the academic disciplines, and she is frequently cited, referred to and talked about in capabilities and well-being literature.

Historically, before the actual development of the capabilities approach, Sen's pioneering article or his Tanner Lecture of 1979 entitled *Equality of What?* already aimed to expose the drawbacks of welfarist utility (linked together with the GDP-model) and Rawlsian pri-

mary goods. The article addressed egalitarian concerns and suggested that the focus of such concern should actually be something like fundamental ‘basic capability equality’ (Cohen, 1993. p. 9 ; Kurstak, 2013. p.18). Already then it was evident that these basic capabilities would be “informationally superior to utility and primary goods” (Kurstak, 2013. p. 19) but also challenging in a sense that they could be seen to be culturally relative. Sen’s following writings (such as *Choice, Welfare and Measurement, Development as Freedom* and his publications in co-operation with Martha Nussbaum in the WIDER institute) have been in the heart of the theoretical starting points of this thesis. As Kurstak also points out, most of Sen’s later writings are concerned primarily with expanding the applicatory scope and reach of his capabilities approach (Kurstak, 2013. p. 20). Nussbaum, on the other hand, puts a great deal of effort into the moral justification and the ethical argumentation for the capabilities approach and she has conducted capability research focused especially on women’s freedoms and capabilities in the developing world. She has also constructed the ten central human capabilities that are examined more closely later on.

When Kurstak examines the differences in Sen’s and Nussbaum’s capability writings, he summarizes the distinction between the two quite clearly. In her writings, Nussbaum aims to extend the rather instrumental role that Sen visualized for this approach into an actual, completely developed ethical-political theory of the good in order to resolve various levels of social injustice. “The proposed means to accomplish this task involve distributing to all individuals a number of highly substantial freedoms to do and to be a variety of things that are deemed essential in order to live a minimally decent and fulfilling life.” (Kursak, 2013. pp. 4-5)

Also, I believe Nussbaum has taken a noticeable step in concretizing and actualizing the approach, as she has enumerated the essential functionings under an aforementioned, original list of ten central human capabilities. The distribution and preservation of these capabilities is to become the direct responsibility of a variety of governmental agencies throughout the world. At least minimal levels of social justice should be attainable for all, “while simultaneously maintaining acceptable degrees of pluralism, diversity, freedom of choice in the process” (Kursak, 2013. pp. 4-5) This is the key behind Nussbaum’s Capabilities Approach. Because of its overarching ambition to serve as a foundation for ethical-political theory of good, Kurstak, for instance, refers to it as the ‘foundational project’(Kurstak, 2013. p. 5).

The tricky issue of plurality and diversity will be looked at more carefully in chapter 5, as critique towards the capability theory is also examined more closely. The capabilities approach has mostly been criticized for being vague, utopic, ethnocentric and universalistic. I have familiarized myself with these counter arguments in the process of reading and re-reading the theory, and have constructed my own understanding of the capabilities approach, its strength, possibilities and weaknesses. The approach is said to be indeed bold, and a number of authors see grave problems associated with it. Kurstak concerns himself with these observations and classifies them into three main groups. Even though he agrees that together the three groups of counter arguments “threaten to severely undermine the overall tenability of Nussbaum’s foundational project”, in the light of salient literature, he examines these observations and reveals a variety of ways in which said problems can be overcome or even shown non-applicable (Kurstak, 2013. pp. 5-6).

Nevertheless, today the Capabilities Approach, or the human development paradigm, can be viewed as one of the most well-known and strongest counter-theories of development and well-being. This ‘new theoretical paradigm’ as Nussbaum, one of its major architects calls it, has increasing impact on international agencies dealing with welfare, from the World Bank to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (Nussbaum, 2011. p. x). It is also now affecting most nations as they currently produce capability-based studies and reports of the well-being of different groups in their own society, inspired by the Human Development Reports published by the UN each year (Nussbaum, 2011. p. x)

It is also undeniable that “Ever since its appearance a quarter of a century ago, the capabilities approach has branched out into many diverse fields of specialization, with its distinct vocabulary making its way into a number of areas of expertise”(Kurstak, 2013. p. 15). As was mentioned earlier, the capabilities approach influenced the formation of the Human Development Report published annually by the UNDP. The approach has aroused interest in such diverse fields as disability studies, education, business ethics, Christian ethics, international ethics, and environmental justice, to give but a few examples (Kurstak, 2013. p. 15). Therefore, one could claim, without greatly exaggerating, that today there is something to be said for capabilities in “(almost) every field, and in (almost) every flavour, relating to some aspect or another human (as well as animal and environmental) well-being” (Kurstak, 2013. p. 15). Hence, it appears that Sen’s initial idea of capabilities applicability on different fields is already happening.

A good example of this interdisciplinary nature of the capabilities paradigm is the role it has had in WIDER conferences and publications. WIDER (World Institute for Development Economics Research) has been established by the United Nations University and it started work in Helsinki in the middle of the 1980's. The main purpose of the institute is to engage in interdisciplinary research in order to help to identify the need for policy-oriented socio-economic research in addressing of global and development problems, as well as domestic problems and their interrelationships (Jayawardena, 1993. pp. v-vi). Sen and Nussbaum have collaborated at the WIDER institute. They organized a conference that concerned the quality of life and social policy at the WIDER in Helsinki in July 1988, and the papers of the conference have been published in a volume of essays, edited by Nussbaum and Sen themselves. These papers have been used as literature in this thesis, as I have been trying to grasp the meaning and the meaningfulness of the capabilities paradigm in the variety of fields of research.

In addition to the capabilities approach's influence in the work of the WIDER, today, there is even an institute called the Human Development and Capability Association (HDCA) operating in order to enhance the realization of the capabilities approach. Both Kurstak and Nussbaum frequently refer to this association's work on policy influencing. On their website, HDCA defines themselves and their mission statement as follows:

*"[...]global community of academics and practitioners that seeks to build an intellectual community around the ideas of human development and the capability approach, and relate these ideas to the policy arena. The association promotes research within many disciplines, ranging from economics to philosophy, development studies, health, education, law, government, sociology, and more. Our members live in over 70 countries worldwide.*

*The Association's main activities include the organization of an annual international conference, the facilitation of a range of thematic groups, and the publication of the quarterly Journal of Human Development and Capabilities, a peer-reviewed academic journal[...]"*

(HDCA, 2014)

Now, as the work of the main theorists and the development of the Capabilities Approach have been briefly enlightened, I shall move on to opening up the conceptual framework of the theory. After this, Nussbaum's somewhat operationalized view of the capabilities shall be introduced, along with her list of Central Human Capabilities.

### 3.2 Conceptualising capability

There is a great deal of ambiguity and confusion associated with the term 'capability'. Even capabilities theorists themselves agree that the implementations of the approach become notoriously difficult because of the sometimes vaguely defined capabilities, and they have been trying to eliminate some of the troublesome aspects surrounding the very definition and use of the term (Kurstak, 2013. pp. 13-14). Amartya Sen, the father of the approach and the capabilities pioneer, is right to admit that "Capability is not an awfully attractive word. It has technocratic sound" (Sen, 1993. p. 30). Without leaving the reader utterly confused, I will try to define the term, yet to do so within the meaningful limits of this thesis.

What does the word 'capability' in itself refer to? The foremost direct translation into Finnish language would be *kyykykyys* that strongly suggests someone's internal ability to do something. Initially, at the beginning of my hermeneutical circle, when I started to ponder the semantics of the word, I interpreted the term as a mixture of capacity (that I concerned as something innate) and ableness (that I viewed as something external, what one is enabled to do). Even though the words are not conceptualized similarly by the main capabilities theorists, my intuitive feeling of capabilities' dualistic nature, when it comes to prerequisites, was not far from the theorists' view.

Daniel Kurstak (2013) studied the writings of the capabilities theorists, and defined the term 'capability' by also considering the word's etymological roots as follows:

*"- - the component, namely a 'capability', refers to the internal ability of someone or something to do certain things, together with the actualization of certain external circumstances of enablement. In the case of human beings, it refers to the conjunction of a particular set of very specific 'foreground' and 'background' conditions that allow individuals to hold freedoms of various types. This distinguishes it from other like terms, such as capaci-*

*ty or ability, in that one may have a capacity for something, or even an ability to do something, but be otherwise prevented from doing it for various additional reasons. On the other hand, when one has an actual, genuine, bona fide capability, then one is, in an important sense, quite free to exercise the object of that capability in question.”*

(Kurstak, 2013. p. 35)

According to Sen, the 'capability' expression was picked to represent the different combinations of things a person is able to do or to be, or the various 'functionings' he or she can achieve. He also explains that the most primitive notion in this approach concerns these 'functionings', and that they can also be viewed as things an individual manages to do in leading a life. Hence the quality of life can be assessed in terms of the capability to achieve these various 'doings and beings'. Some functionings are extremely elementary, while others could be more complex, but still widely valued. As examples of these more complex functionings, Sen gives achieving self-respect or being socially integrated.” (Sen, 1993. pp. 30-31)

Nussbaum follows Sen's example, and also defines the capabilities in their most simple form as doings and beings. When she has to define what capabilities are, she repeatedly states that they are answers to the question “what are people able to do and to be?” (Nussbaum, 2011. pp. x, 18, 20). In other words, capabilities are what Sen calls, 'substantial freedoms', the various functionings that were mentioned above. Nussbaum sees capabilities as types of freedoms to achieve alternative functionings; they are not merely abilities inside a person but also freedoms and opportunities stemming from a combination of personal abilities and social, political and economic environment (Nussbaum, 2011. p. 20). This is an important observation, and here, again, the dual nature and the interdependency of internal and external prerequisites of the capabilities can be observed.

Nussbaum, indeed, has further divided the capabilities into 'internal' and 'external' capabilities, and this division is frequently mentioned in many capabilities writings and publications. Without going in-depth with these, it can be stated that 'internal' and 'external' capabilities are different kinds of foreground and background conditions that are both necessary, but alone insufficient, for holding actual capability-freedoms (Kurstak, 2013. pp. 70-71). By internal capabilities Nussbaum means states of a person – characteristics such

as intellectual and emotional capacities, internalized learning, fitness and health, personality traits etc. – that are not innate and fixed but dynamic and can be trained and developed usually in social, political, familial and economic environments (Nussbaum, 2011. p. 21). According to her, it is important to distinguish these internal capabilities from basic, innate capabilities and the real ‘substantial freedoms’, most likely in order to see the prerequisites for the capabilities to actualize. Indeed, she argues that a society might succeed rather well at producing internal capabilities but might cut off paths through which people actually have the circumstances to function in accordance with those capabilities. For instance, there are societies where people are educated so that they are capable of free speech on political matters (internally), but then, in essence and in practice, they are denied free expression through repression of speech. (Nussbaum, 2011. p. 21)

Nussbaum is trying to lessen the complexity of the terminology by referring to Sen’s real ‘substantial freedoms’ as combined capabilities; these combined capabilities consist of internal capabilities in addition to the social, political and economic conditions in which functioning can actually be chosen (Nussbaum, 2011.pp. 21-22). This term ‘combined capabilities’ is extremely important, as it refers to a real freedom and a capability to be and to do something. In this thesis, often when I use the word ‘capabilities’, I am indeed referring to ‘combined capabilities’. However, Nussbaum reminds us of the interlinkedness of the terminology by pointing out that the distinction between combined and internal capabilities is not always evident or sharp, as one may acquire an internal capability by some kind of functioning, but may later on lose it if one has no opportunity to function (Nussbaum, 2011. p. 23).

The mention of substantial freedoms and real freedoms brings us to another important word related to the concept of capabilities. According to my interpretation, individual freedom has significance in the capabilities concept in terms of choice and human functionings. As Amartya Sen puts it “The freedom to lead different types of life is reflected in the person’s capability set” (Sen, 1993. p. 33). He also sees capabilities and freedom linked in a sense that capabilities constitute an essential part of individual freedom, since the capability of a person depends on diverse factors such as personal characteristics and social arrangements. Sen admits that freedom, again, is a difficult and problematic concept to define, and that comparisons of freedom raise interesting issues of evaluation. (Sen, 1993. pp. 33-34)



Nussbaum also concerns capabilities in relation to the concept of freedom. She affirms that, in a sense, the importance of capabilities lies in the way in which they may lead to functionings: a society could hardly be called good or well-functioning if it has provided the people with capabilities that are not used or actualized. That way, it can be viewed that functionings give capabilities their end-point, but according to Nussbaum, “to promote capabilities is to promote areas of freedom, and this is not the same as making people function in a certain way” (Nussbaum, 2011. p. 25). Having capabilities also means that one has choice and options, where options can be seen as freedoms, and freedom, to Nussbaum, has intrinsic value. (Nussbaum, 2011. p. 25)

Even though the conceptualizing of the different types of capabilities – and their relation to the terms freedoms and functionings – is interesting and has been extremely important for the development of my understanding of the Capabilities Approach, too much space cannot be given to this discussion here. Kurstak, as well, thinks along the same lines and admits that the capabilities definition can be found needlessly confusing. Going back to the internal and external capabilities, and to the question which of these actually have the abilities to function and freedom-units in their definitions, he suggests that this ambiguity could be overcome by simply reducing the concept, and regularly referring to combined capabilities. “Nussbaum only refers to a real capability freedom-unit by way of what she later calls *combined* capabilities. And that is the only concept that the respective term ‘capability’ out[sic] to correspond to.” (Kurstak 2013. pp. 70-71).

### **3.3 From Sen to Nussbaum: Operationalizing capabilities**

When thinking of the research question of this thesis, we can see that the green line of this hermeneutical study is the interpretative reading of Nussbaum’s capabilities theory. Nussbaum’s operational view of the approach is the main interest of this thesis as are its potential institutional implementations –especially in the context of formal education. Therefore, the following section attempts to further explain and understand Nussbaum’s somewhat more operationalized view of the capabilities by, for instance, presenting one of the approach’s main tools, the list of Ten Central Human Capabilities.

As was already pointed out, Nussbaum’s capabilities approach mirrors Sen’s in many regards, and they have done a great deal of work together. However, Nussbaum’s approach branches out into other important pathways as well. Unlike Nussbaum, Sen does not actu-

ally fully define, assess, order, value or distribute various capability types, even by way of an example. He merely proposes the instruments by way of which these tasks are to be performed and argues for their trustworthiness and applicability, whereas the actual full translation and realization of his capabilities approach is left for other capabilities theorists to tackle. (Kurstak, 2013. p. 24)

Martha Nussbaum has become the most well-known researcher for taking on this task of operationalization. At an early stage of her capability writings already, she recognized the connection between Sen's central idea regarding the aim of justice focusing on freedoms(capabilities) and the Aristotelian thought that shall be explained more in detail later on. Also, at an early stage, she engaged in an in-depth discussion what she means by the functionings and capabilities (this was done already in her *Nature, Function and Capability: Aristotle on Political Distribution* (1988)). While she borrows Sen's initial conceptual framework, she also adds further refinement to it by drawing distinction between the already mentioned internal, external and basic capabilities. (Kurstak, 2013. p. 25)

However, perhaps most importantly, at least for the purpose of this thesis, Nussbaum resolves which of the many crucial capabilities ought to be enabled and facilitated by governments for their people. Differently to Sen, who substantially leaves these valuational and ordering exercises to be carried out and executed within the various socio-political, economic, and cultural environments where human well-being is to be examined with a capabilities-based approach, Nussbaum specifies the need to forge a list of central human capabilities that has to be objective and universal enough in order to become the object of a global overlapping consensus (Kurstak, 2013. p. 26).

### 3.3.1 Nussbaum's metric of 10 Central Human Capabilities

*“At the core of her foundational project is a list of roughly ten such central human capabilities’, intended to serve as a guide and to be implemented into the respective constitutions of all nations around the globe. The list itself rests on what I refer to here as the ‘capabilities metric’, which corresponds to a conceptual core intended to define what it is exactly that is meant by ‘capability’..”*

(Kurstak, 2013. p. 13)

This is what Kurstak says about Nussbaum's list of central human capabilities. The list, or a metric, indeed gives a more concrete conception of what essential capabilities are, as well as what she believes it is to be a (functioning) human being. For me, this list has functioned as a sort of a framework, a declaration for capabilities. It lists doings and beings that are truly characteristically human. In the following, the list of ten central human capabilities is presented, as listed most recently by Nussbaum herself in one of my primary sources *Creating Capabilities, The Human Development Approach* (2011).

“1. *Life*. Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.

2. *Bodily Health*. Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.

3. *Bodily Integrity*. Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.

4. *Senses, Imagination and Thought*. Being able to use one's senses to imagine, think and reason – and to do these in a ‘truly human way’, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid nonbeneficial pain.

5. *Emotions*. Being able to have attachments to things outside of ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.)

6. *Practical Reason*. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (This entails protection of the liberty of conscience and religious observance.)

7. *Affiliation*. (A) Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. (protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.) (B) Having the social bases of self-respect and nonhumiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of nondiscrimination, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin.

8. *Other Species*. Being able to live with have concern for and in relation to other animals, plants, and the world of nature.

9. *Play*. Being able to laugh, play, to enjoy recreational activities.

10. *Control over One's Environment*. (A) Political. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association. (B) *Material*. Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers."

(Nussbaum, 2011. pp. 33-34)

Nussbaum did not develop her list in the first article, even though she already underlined the importance of practical reason being one of the capabilities. The first version of her list of central human capabilities was seen in her publication *Aristotelian Social Democracy* (1990). This list, together with its extent of application or operation and the justificatory exercises that surround it, came to constitute the vital core of Nussbaum's capability approach. And the core stays as is, for the most part. Throughout her successive publications,

her central capabilities list, for instance, undergoes only a few slight alterations and modifications. (Kurstak, 2013. p. 26-28)

The way in which Nussbaum comments on her list in one of her earlier publications, *Women, Culture and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities* (1995), captures well the way I have understood this list. She claims that if a life lacks any of the listed capabilities, it will fall short of being a ‘good human life’. Thus, it would be reasonable to concern these capabilities in assessing the quality of life in a country and in asking about the role of public policy in meeting human needs. She also states that the list is general in order to leave room for further negotiation and plural specification. Nevertheless, according to her, “like a set of constitutional guarantees” the list offers real guidance in the ongoing process of further specification and refinement. (Nussbaum, 1995. p. 85)

More recently, rather than developing the list of central human capabilities or ‘the capabilities metric’ itself, most of Nussbaum’s later work focuses a great deal more on expanding the reach of her approach into different topics, and on advancing the justificatory exercises. Indeed, I agree with Kurstak on the note that one particular area where Nussbaum can be claimed to excel in, is the offering of justifications and the defending of her capabilities approach. Nussbaum’s examination is thorough and she develops a number of justificatory exercises that can, again, be classified into different groups aimed at fulfilling a specific argumentative task in the justification of her foundational project, while her critique towards the metrics of utility and resources is again very similar to Sen’s (Kurstak, 2013 pp. 29-32). These moral justificatory exercises of the approach, again, shall be examined more closely in chapter 5, along with other debatable issues with the 10 Central Human Capabilities. Now, I shall move on with the reading of the Capabilities Approach in the light of its philosophical influences and other theories of well-being.

### **3.4 Philosophical influences and the value-base**

*“The basic intuition from which the capability approach starts, in the political arena, is that the human capabilities exert a moral claim that they should be developed. Human beings are creatures such that, provided with the right educational and material support, they can become fully capable - -“*

*(Nussbaum, 1995. p. 88)*

*“My view holds, with Aristotle, that a good political arrangement is one ‘in accordance with which anyone whatsoever might do well and live a flourishing life’”*

(Nussbaum, 1995. p. 81)

*“.. we believe that certain basic human endowments have a claim to be assisted in developing, and exert that claim on others, and especially, as Aristotle saw, on government. - - I think it is the underlying basis, in the Western philosophical tradition, for many notions of human rights. I suggest, then, that in thinking of political planning we begin from this notion, thinking of the basic capabilities of human beings as needs for functioning, which give rise to correlated political duties.”*

(Nussbaum, 1995. p. 88)

As can be interpreted from the quotations above, Nussbaum’s Capabilities Approach has a significant and apparent change agenda and value-base that is constructed on her views on good life and good governance. Especially Aristotelian thinking has influenced Nussbaum’s work immensely. In the following, the philosophical roots and influences of the Capabilities Approach shall be enlightened. Also, attention will be briefly paid on human rights and equality (or rather, equity), the two concepts that I recognize or interpret as the underlying values behind the Capabilities Approach.

### 3.4.1 Philosophical influences

Both Sen and Nussbaum insist that even though a modern view, the Capabilities Approach and the intuitive ideas that lie behind it have a long history and their roots in many different cultures. Even at the level of philosophical theory, the approach has many sources. The ideas of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore as well as earlier Indian rational thinkers have been formative for Sen and thus for Nussbaum as well. The most important influences of Nussbaum’s version of the Capabilities Approach are philosophic works from ancient Greece and Rome, even though Adam Smith, Kant, Mill and Marx have also been influential. Nussbaum also notes that John Rawls’s work has been of significant importance, and Rawls’s Theory of Justice shall be introduced more in detail shortly (Nussbaum, 2011. pp. 123-125). First, however, I am going to look at relevant Aristotelian ideas that, it appears, Nussbaum, Sen, Smith and Rawls all share an interest in.

### **The Aristotelian concept of eudaimonia**

The Aristotelian idea of *eudaimonia*, “good life”, happiness and the definition of it, is central in this thesis. A great deal of theoretical and socio-scientific debates that I have been reading, concern the idea of happiness, well-being and good life. These are viewed as the aims of life and hence as the aims of education (Noddings, 2003. p. 173). Education, then again, is viewed as preparation for life and it shall be discussed more thoroughly in chapter 4.

When discussing good life, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle asks what is good for a human being and answers that “It must be the ultimate end or object of human life: something that is in itself completely satisfying. Happiness fits this description”(Aristotle, 1976. p. 73). Happiness here, indeed, originally means eudaimonia. In defining of the term eudaimonia, I refer to Jonathan Barnes (1976), who takes account of the work on Aristotle. According to him,

*“.. happiness, as the term is used in ordinary English, is a sort of mental or emotional state or condition; to call a man happy is (to put it very vaguely indeed) to say something about his general state of mind. Eudaimonia, on the other hand, is not simply a mental state - - it has been pretty well defined as sort of well-living(euzōia) and well-acting(eupraxia) - - to say something about how he lives and what he does. The notion of eudaimonia is closely tied, in a way in which the happiness is not, to success: the eudaimōn is the man who makes success of his life and actions, who realizes his aims and ambitions as a man, who fulfils himself”*

(Barnes, 1976. pp. 33-34.)

Thus, when Barnes (1976) discusses eudaimonia, he translates it as ‘happiness’ in inverted commas, to illustrate that the original Aristotelian term has more meaning to it. The same has been done by other researchers, but not by all translators which might mislead or affect the interpretations of the readers of Aristotle. I believe we face the same problem when we read Aristotle in Finnish if the word *onnellisuus* is used. For my own understanding and interpretation of Aristotelian ethics, I think that it was useful to recognize the difference

between these two terms before reading Aristotle's ideas on good life and human functioning.

Nevertheless, 'happiness' shall be used as a translation for eudaimonia for now. But what is happiness, then? Aristotle proposes that "If we consider what the function of man is, we find that happiness is a virtuous activity of the soul" (Aristotle, 1976. p. 75). Hence, 'happiness' can be seen as an activity: "A man is 'happy' if and only if, over some considerable period of time, he frequently performs with some success the most perfect of typically human tasks" (Barnes, 1976. p. 36). The question that immediately arises is: What are these typically human tasks? Where the Aristotelian answer is that humans' typical task is rational activity (Barnes, 1976. pp. 33-34).

These truly human activities and ways take us back to Martha Nussbaum and the Capabilities Approach with its central human functionings. As was stated earlier, Nussbaum recognizes the connection between Sen's writings regarding the aim of justice and the distribution of individual freedoms as bearing much closeness to Aristotelian ideas. Her capabilities writings rely on the Aristotelian thought and onto "his ideas regarding the object of human living as reaching eudemonia, or the 'good life', and his ideas regarding the purpose of government in making it possible for citizens to reach it, if they so desire (i.e., empowering them with the required capabilities)." (Kurstak, 2013. p. 25). I agree with Kurstak's and Nussbaum's reading of Aristotle, and would propose that the link between the Aristotelian thought and Nussbaum's view on capabilities and good governance is apparent. Very similarly to the Nussbaum quotes that I cited at the beginning of this section, Aristotle states:

*" - - happiness has been described as a kind of virtuous activity of the soul ; whereas all the other goods either are necessary pre-conditions of happiness or naturally contribute to it and serve as its instruments. - - the end of political science is the highest good ; and the chief concern of this science is to endue the citizens with certain qualities, namely virtue and the readiness to do fine deeds. "*

(Aristotle, 1976. p. 81).



## John Rawls's philosophy of justice

In the field of social sciences, and especially when social justice is considered, John Rawls and the influence of his work cannot be ignored. A variety of authors I have read for this thesis state unanimously that Rawls and his *A Theory of Justice* (1971) was groundbreaking, influential and had a major role in moral and political philosophy in the twentieth century (Audard, 2007. p. 1; Freeman, 1999. p. ix; Nussbaum, 2001 & 2011. p. 84; Thomas & Vaughan, 2004. p. 10). It has a great deal of significance to the Capabilities Approach and when reading the capabilities literature and Rawls's work, one may observe and discover a variety of overlapping ideas. However, even though Rawls has had a major philosophical influence on the Capabilities Approach, Nussbaum also finds some difficulties with his theory.

John Rawls, in a sense, revived the interest in substantive questions of political philosophy and his *A Theory of Justice* changed the climate of debate in philosophy, economics, law and public policy, by asking questions such as what makes a society unjust, and how is social justice connected to an individual's pursuit of the good life (Nussbaum, 2001).

The instinctive idea from which Rawl's theory starts is simple yet thoughtful and thorough, according to which each person possesses a righteousness or inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot supersede or overrule. That is to say, the pursuit of greater social good should not make us harm the lives of individuals by diminishing or cutting their basic rights. In particular Rawls is concerned with the many ways in which qualities that have no moral worth – like class, race, and sex – commonly mar people's prospects in life. (Nussbaum, 2001)

Catherine Audard, a researcher with an extensive appreciation for Rawls's work, introduces the main principles for Rawls's theory. In *A Theory of Justice* Rawls searches the best public principles of justice that are true to our inmost moral intuitions concerning political and economic justice. The first principle of justice acknowledges the matter of constitutional rights and liberties and claims that each person should have "an equal right to a scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme for others" Audard, 2007. p. 9). In other words, protections for basic liberties are bestowed, in particular, the *fair value of political liberties* ought to be granted, securing citizens' full participation in the political process (Audart, 2007. p. 9).

The second principle deals with the issues of socioeconomic inequalities and of distributive justice. According to this principle, *fair equal opportunity* must prevail, ensuring that all equally talented people have equal access to positions of their desire, and that inequalities connected with such positions must support and assist the least advantaged, according to the *difference principle* (Audart 2007. p. 9). This difference principle is mentioned at several points in *A Theory of Justice*. Thomas & Vaughan apply Rawls's ideas when they discuss history of social justice in their book *Inclusive Education* and say the following about this principle: "It is worth noting that the difference principle requires that inequalities in wealth and social position (which are inevitable) be arranged to benefit the worst off group in society – an important point to consider when thinking about opportunities in education and how to maximize everyone's inclusion in education" (Thomas & Vaughan, 2004. p. 11).

What Audart also points out about these Rawls's principles of justice, is that the first principle must be applied before the second can be implemented. The two aspects of justice are thus tightly united in a concept of democratic equality. She thinks that this is sort of striking as the two aspects of justice are citizen's civil and political rights on one hand, and socioeconomic rights on the other, and there has traditionally been a tension between the two in the democratic thought. (Audart, 2007. p. 9)

Rawls reworked the traditional idea of social contract, and utilized it in order to firmly and forcibly criticize the utilitarian approach to justice and well-being. He himself points out in the foreword of his *A Theory of Justice* (freely translated from the Finnish version *Oikeudenmukaisuusteoria*), that he has attempted to generalize and abstract the traditional theory of social contract, as it has been represented by Locke, Rousseau and Kant. He strongly relies on Kant especially, and suggests that his views must come across as classic and familiar to the readers. Rawls also states that he believes that his theory will define justice in a sense that it will be shown to be superior compared to the utilitarian view. (Rawls, 1988. p. 5)

Rawls explains that by the principle of utility, a society is viewed to be rightly ordered, and thus just, when its institutions are organized in a way that they enable the realization of the greatest sum of satisfactions. The extraordinary feature of the principle of utility is that it does not directly matter how this sum of satisfaction is distributed among individuals, any more than it matters how a person distributes one's contentment over time. Unlike the

social contraction approaches, the principle of utility cannot explain the fact that in a just society the liberties of equal citizenship are guaranteed and the rights secured by justice are not subjects to political bargaining. Rawls comes to a conclusion that the most logical and legitimate alternative to the utilitarian view is its ‘traditional rival’, the social contract. This doctrine’s principles “arise from an agreement among free and independent persons in an original position of equality and hence reflect the integrity and equal sovereignty of the rational persons”. (Rawls, 1999. pp. 131-132)

When Nussbaum discusses Rawls’s significance to her approach, she also presents challenges this social contractarian view poses on well-being and justice. Nussbaum proposes that although the theory of justice produced by Rawls offers an effective and potent theoretical account of social distribution in many areas, it adopts and accepts some presumptions from classical Lockean theory of the social contract that even Rawls himself saw as evoking difficulties for his theory. Nussbaum writes that despite of this, Rawls was eventually unwilling to abandon the social contract structure in favor of a more purely Kantian theory. The fact that Rawls’s theory of justice is a descendant of the classical theory of the social contract, in fact, creates most of its difficulties from a point of view of the Capabilities Approach. Firstly, all contract theories, including Rawls’s, expect or presume an imprecise equality of physical and mental power and capability of the participants. Secondly, the theory holds that the contract is to the mutual advantage of the participants, and it is advantage – not altruism or love of others – that unites them in a society. (Nussbaum, 2011. pp. 84-86)

However, these assumptions of rough equality and mutual advantage imply that Rawls’s contractarian view cannot handle well the situations and cases in which we find a profound asymmetry of power between the parties, one that is not simply corrected by rearranging wealth and income. For that exact reason, persons with severe physical or cognitive disabilities cannot be viewed as included under the definition of capacities of citizens in the Well Ordered Society. This complication is worsened by the fact that Rawls’s perception of the person is based on rationality (which is a somewhat Kantian view). Thus, under that view, people with severe cognitive disabilities would not count as persons, since human beings who are unable to enter into contracts or agreements do not have political justice. When it comes to nonhuman animals, Rawls does not believe that our connection with them entails issues of justice, most likely for similar reasons implying their lack of rational capacity. He therefore thinks that we have ethical, but not political duties to animals. For

Nussbaum it is rather self-evident and straightforward that almost all animals have a dignity and are hence subjects of justice. She claims that this dignity of the animals deserves respect and reinforcement from laws and institutions. (Nussbaum, 2011. pp. 87-88)

Nevertheless, Nussbaum gives credit to Rawls's achievements in modern Western political philosophy, and admits that the Capabilities Approach has not been shown to be superior to Rawls's version of the social contract in all areas, but only in these certain problem areas. She also wants to make known that she thinks that contract theories provide us with perception into social collaboration and social justice, and that they give an enormous help in seeing what a society built on an ideal of impartiality would look like (i.e. not favouring people in regards of wealth, class, gender, race for instance). According to Nussbaum, even though the social contract tradition in its classical form is rejected, its inmost, basic idea of a fair agreement remains. She rather believes that even as contractarian approach as Rawls's theory is, the fact that it delivers similar results to the Capabilities Approach, generates confidence that she and the other capabilities theorists are on the right track. (Nussbaum, 2001. pp. 86-89)

### 3.4.2 Value-base

According to my reading and interpretation, there is a visible value-base and even a change agenda in Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach. Nussbaum is considered as a feminist researcher, and her approach has been used in gender studies. For instance the Capabilities Approach has been used to strengthen the individual agency perspective and issues of bodily integrity, as was recently done by Mervi Heikkinen in her doctoral dissertation on sexist harassment as an issue of gender equality politics (Heikkinen, 2012. p. 5, pp. 32-34). The feminist agenda is observable in Nussbaum's writings and, henceforward, in the research literature of this thesis. Also, Nussbaum repeatedly states her standpoint, appearing as a spokesperson for equality for *all*, against global injustices. Thus, even though a feminist researcher, she does not limit her approach to benefit and empower a single, underprivileged 'minority' (women).

Some of this social-justice seeking value-base of the Capabilities-Approach became apparent already as the philosophical influences of the approach were introduced above. Indeed, global human rights movement and different equality theories also stem from Aristotelian ethics – which again bares much closeness to philosophical thinking and intuitive ideas of

different cultures around the world. Next, the Capabilities Approach shall be mirrored in its relation to global human rights and equity.

## **Global human rights**

Now when I think back my first encounter with the Capabilities Theory, glancing through Nussbaum's list of Ten Central Human Capabilities reminded me of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Perhaps not surprisingly, my initial reaction was somewhat frustrated, a mix of confusion and disinterest: "Why do we need yet another list? What is the difference between rights and capabilities? What do these terms even mean? How is this different, is this an applied or shortened version, a sort of a summary? Oh, she also mentions plants and animals"... Why I think it is relevant to share my first doubtful reaction here, is that first and foremost I recognized the similarity between human rights and capabilities. I also paid attention to the fact that plants and animals were mentioned in Nussbaum's list, and wondered what the difference between a right and a capability might be. These initial confused reactions were actually quite relevant questions that the capabilities theorists have been trying to answer in their writings while considering the link between the Capabilities Approach and human rights. In the following, this interconnectedness shall be briefly discussed.

While studying the ways in which Sen and Nussbaum construct, conceptualise and view the human capabilities and their theory, I started to recognize some similarities to the language that is being used in human rights documents and literature I have read during the years. Both human rights and human capabilities seemed to be presented as fundamental entitlements and they seemed to have similar cross-cutting principles.

Indeed, one of the first links I made – before having read what Sen and Nussbaum had to say about human rights – was the idea of indivisibility while I was reading Kurstak's presentation of the list of Central Human Capabilities. He writes: "all capabilities present on the list remain incommensurable, irreplaceable (no trade-offs) amongst themselves, and are all required as a set for proper minimal levels of social justice to be attained." (Kurstak, 2013. p. 69). Here one can observe the same principle of indivisibility that is strongly present in the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights, according to which different rights (civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights) can only successfully exist in combination.

Sakiko Fukuda-Parr (2009) discusses human rights-based approach to development, and recognizes significant links between Sen's original Capabilities Approach and human rights. According to her:

*“Human rights is one of the key concepts, along with capabilities and functionings, entitlements and fundamental freedom, that Sen has used in defining the ultimate ends of development expansion of capabilities and human freedom. - - capability and development approach provides a useful conceptual framework within which human rights principles can be incorporated, because his approach defines the ultimate purpose of development as the expansion of human freedom. Human development (and the capability approach) and human rights thus share a common motivation (UNDP2000)”.*

(Fukuda-Parr, 2009. p. 76-77).

In the light of this view, it could be proposed that these approaches are linked to one another in a sense of being relevant and useful to one another. They are mutually beneficial as they share a common motivation and hence offer supporting theoretical ‘back-up’ for the call for global value change.

Nussbaum herself, comments on the discussion concerning the relatedness of human rights and capabilities, by stating that the Capabilities Approach and the international human rights movement are closely allied. She states that both herself and Sen emphasize the close link between the two, and that her approach is often characterized as a species of human rights approach. According to Nussbaum, the common ground between the two approaches exists in the idea that all people have the same core entitlements just by virtue of their humanity, and that a society should respect and support these entitlements. Furthermore, she suggests that there is additionally a close relationship of content. The human rights in the United Nation’s declaration and other human rights instruments are overlapping substantially with the capabilities Nussbaum lists. She also notes that both of the approaches play a similar role, providing bases for constitutional guarantees and for cross-cultural comparisons. (Nussbaum, 2011. pp. 62-63)

However, there are some differences with the approaches as well, and the Capabilities Approach can be argued to supplement the standard human rights approaches. As Nussbaum explains, her approach is broader than the human rights approach in a sense that it holds that nonhuman animals also have entitlements, and she articulates the relationship between human entitlements and those of other species. Therefore, it could be said that Nussbaum’s

approach also addresses nature ethics. Additionally, “human rights paradigm has been criticized for being insufficiently attentive to issues of gender, race, and so on, the Capabilities Approach, like the best human rights approaches, tries to remedy those defects” (Nussbaum, 2011. p. 63). Nussbaum also defends the relevance of her theory by arguing that it articulated the relationship between human rights and human dignity more clearly than most standard rights accounts. Finally, she claims that the Capabilities Approach tries to be a fully integrated theory unlike some human rights approaches by spelling out the relationship between human rights and duties. (Nussbaum, 2011. pp. 62-63.)

Conclusively, Sen puts his understanding of the interlinkedness and the meaning of both approaches quite well in his article, *Human Rights and Capabilities*:

*“The two concepts — human rights and capabilities — go well with each other, so long as we do not try to subsume either concept entirely within the territory of the other. There are many human rights that can be seen as rights to particular capabilities. However, human rights to important process freedoms cannot be adequately analysed within the capability framework. Furthermore, both human rights and capabilities have to depend on the process of public reasoning. The methodology of public scrutiny draws on Rawlsian understanding of ‘objectivity’ in ethics, but the impartiality that is needed cannot be confined within the borders of a nation. Public reasoning without territorial confinement is important for both. ”*

(Sen, 2005. p. 151)

The similar nature of the Capabilities Approach and the human rights approaches shall be re-discussed in chapter 4, where the approach’s possible application in basic education is pondered on. Human rights education shall then be briefly considered as a potential path leading example. Next, however, another cross-cutting value-based principle of the Capabilities Approach – strongly linked to the idea of human rights – shall be introduced.

### **“Equality of What?”: Equity as a value**



*“...whereas there is room to argue about whether innate potential differs across people, human dignity, from the start, is equal in all who are agents in the first place - -Equality holds a primitive place in the theory at this point - -[however,] From the assumption of equal dignity it does not follow that all the centrally important capabilities are to be equalized. Treating people as equals may not entail equalizing the living conditions for all.”*

(Nussbaum, 2011. p. 31)

It is easy to say that according to my interpretation the Capabilities Approach takes a stand on equality. It is more difficult to say what equality in this approach actually means, as it is similarly difficult to say what equality as a concept even means. Surely the capabilities theorists such as Nussbaum and Sen have their own interpretations of the concept, as do I as a researcher in this thesis. In the following, I will try to shed light on the link between equality and the Capabilities Approach, highlighting the notion that (like in many contexts), equality does not mean ‘same for everyone’. Hence, I eventually suggest ‘equity’ as a more suitable term when it comes to social justice and the Capabilities Approach.

The theme of equality is strongly present in the capabilities paradigm. Even aforementioned Sen’s pioneering essay, a sort of a ‘kick-off-start’ for the Capabilities Approach was called *Equality of What*. According to Kurstak(2013), even though Sen is not dealing with the idea of equality theory itself, the theme of equality perades Sen’s capabilities approach at large as capabilities to function are seen by him as targets of proper egalitarian concerns, per se(Kurstak, 2013. p. 21). Most fields that Sen’s ideas have been implemented in(such as poverty analysis, human rights theory, gender conflicts and economic and human development theory) also have something imperative to say about the role and impact of the capabilities approach upon examination of equality and inequality, as they subsequently apply to the subject-matter of each of these fields in question (Kurstak, 2013. p. 21). Education was not mentioned as one of the influenced fields by Kurstak but it is repeatedly mentioned by Nussbaum, and it is naturally closely linked to other fields of social sciences. Therefore, the consideration of the Capabilities Approach in an equality point of view in education could be very fruitful, and it is, indeed, one of the initial starting points for me to start writing this thesis.

*“...concerning the relationship of this threshold list to an account of human equality. A commitment to bringing all human beings across a certain threshold of capability to choose represents a certain sort of commitment to equality: for the view treats all persons as equal bearers of human claims, no matter where they are starting from in terms of circumstances, special talents, wealth, gender, or race. On the other hand, I have said nothing so far about how one should regard inequalities that persist once the threshold level has been attained for all persons. To some extent I feel this would be premature, since the threshold level has so rarely been attained for the complete capability set.”*

(Nussbaum, 1995. p. 86)

Here, at an early stage of her capabilities writings, Nussbaum ponders on the role of equality in the capabilities theory. How I understand what she means to say, is that there are different levels of equality. The Capabilities Approach sees all human beings as equal, and even though in some more developed countries, all people could be said to have the ‘capability set’, it does not mean that all people would have equal opportunities to practice their capabilities. Nussbaum gives an example of the USA or Japan perhaps giving large health support here or educational distribution there, but still exhibiting inequalities of attainment between the races or the genders (Nussbaum, 1995. p. 86). This again shows how relevant the Capabilities Approach as the theory of well-being would be to all nations and societies regardless of their GDP. I would argue, however, similarly to Nussbaum that widespread equality goes hand in hand with the actual realization of the Central Human Capabilities. Commenting on the previous Japan/USA example, she proposes that the situation contains capability failure after all as subordination (here racial or gender) is itself a failure to attain complete personhood (Nussbaum, 1995. P 86).

Equality and its significance to the Capabilities Approach can, of course, also be looked at in relation to its antonym, inequality. In the very beginning of his book, *Killing Fields of Inequality*, Göran Therborn (an equality theorist and Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Cambridge) states that:

*“Inequality is a violation of human dignity; it is a denial of the possibility for everybody’s human capabilities to develop. It takes many forms, and it has many effects - - Inequality, then, is not just about the size of our wallets. It is a socio-cultural order, which (for the most of us) reduces our capabilities to function as human beings, our health, our self-respect, our sense of self, as well as our resources to act and participate in this world.”*

(Therborn, 2013. p. 1)

Here we can see that inequality can be seen as capability-deprivation, which means that the realization of the central human capabilities for all individuals would lead to a more equal world. Therborn, again, also points out in his theoretical cross-draught that inequality is not to be combated with “untenable thesis of sameness of needs and faculties” or “the crude egalitarian utopia” that has to be allocated once and for all time (Therborn, 2013. p. 40). Also Therborn’s discussion on equal distribution moves from Marx and Rawls to Sen and Nussbaum. Indeed, even though he admits that the approach might sound a bit abstract, he writes: “I see the ‘capabilities approach’ as the best theoretical basis for analyses and struggles against inequalities, which should be seen as multidimensional barriers to equal human capabilities of functioning in the world” (Therborn, 2013. p. 41).

According to my understanding, nearly all of the researchers I have studied for this section in order to grasp how equality is seen as a prevailing value in the Capabilities Approach, seem to call for equity instead of egalitarian utopia. Therborn wants to abandon the untenable thesis of sameness, and Nussbaum (in the citation on the previous page) reminds us that there is no need to equalize living conditions for all in order to give every human being an equal dignity. These views could be regarded as influenced interpretations of the earlier mentioned, Rawls’s *difference principle* according to which, ‘fair equal opportunity’ must prevail, and any inequalities of opportunity must support and assist the least advantaged in the context of socioeconomic inequalities and distributive justice. Thus, instead of using the term equality, I propose the use of the word ‘equity’. Equity can be viewed as a more relative concept, and it does not suggest ‘same for everyone’. Rather, the term equity, or its close synonym fairness, can be considered as an issue of distributive justice and equal opportunity (Grubb & Al., 2005. pp. 8-9). This term shall be revisited in chapter 4 in the context of capabilities and basic education.

I would say, in the light of my understanding of the Capabilities Approach so far, that equity is strongly present in a sense that the theory promotes the development of capable indi-

viduals and the dividing of the ‘good’. The approach calls for local, national and global responsibility of communal and individual well-being, and in that way aims at (and gives a promise of) a more egalitarian world where different institutions would enable and enhance capable individuals to care for themselves, others, environment, animals etc. The approach is universal and equal also when thinking of the ethos of all human beings having the right to develop the indivisible ten Central Human Capabilities (in order to accomplish at least the minimal level of well-being). A great deal has not been written about the concept of equality nor equity in a context of equal level of capabilities. I however, see the capabilities approach as something that, undoubtedly, promotes equity by ways of equal opportunities and social justice.

Even though the definition of the term equality – or rather equity – and its relevance to the Capabilities Approach might seem difficult, perhaps shedding light on the relatedness of these concepts has been useful. After all, the purpose of this section was to examine the philosophical influences and the valuational starting points of the approach. I could cite Therborn here one more time, as my sentiments of the subject are rather similar to his at the moment: “While I am committed to equality as a value, I see no reason to spell out an ideal state of Equality” (Therborn, 2013. p. 41).

### **3.5 Capabilities in relation to other theories of well-being**

As I have referred to the Capabilities Approach multiple times as something that is considered a ‘necessary counter-theory’, its relation to other approaches ought to be presented. Both Sen and Nussbaum, the two main founders of the Capabilities Approach, have dedicated noticeable time and energy arguing against distributive theories of justice. Nussbaum and Sen classify the theories they criticize under the two main headings of resourcist and welfarist approaches, and continuously in their writings attempt to show that their Capabilities Approach is superior. The next section will, in brief, represent my reading of this debate.

Different approaches to well-being are presented and assessed in different ways by the capabilities theorists whose work I have studied for this thesis. Kurstak prefers to group the different approaches under larger umbrellas, and talks about *resourcist approach* and *commodities approach*. According to him, resourcism proposes that the key issues of social justice are successfully addressed by distributing a mixture of ‘resources’ to individuals in

various ways (Kurstak, 2013. p. 142). He also points out that resourcist theories vary significantly both within the resource object and the distributive spread. The commodities approach, he sees as a form of a ‘crude resourcist approach’, that has been extremely popular after the second World War and is based upon a presupposition that a distribution of actual goods (commodities) is the key to establishing minimal level living standards for all (Kurstak, 2013. p. 144). Kurstak continues by stating that these approaches have been exposed to many different arguments, and that they are inherently characteristically different to the basic need approach –which again is the starting point for our Capabilities Approach. According to him, initially Sen thought that the basic need approach was insufficient, somewhere between the crude and highly refined resourcism, and he started to move towards Rawlsian resourcism and developing a more sophisticated approach. The Capabilities Approaches have since occasionally been praised for seeing beyond the limitations of crude commodities distribution. (Kurstak, 2013. pp. 142- 152)

As I begun to hermeneutically read these theories of well-being, I instantly associated the terms such as ‘welfarist’ and ‘utilitarian’ with maximization or optimization, GDP and economic growth. Undeniably, these were negative associations. Initially, I understood ‘distributive theories’ to be something else, something that paid attention to the spreading of the resources and not merely on utility. I started to examine the different theories of well-being but remained quite confused with the field even after the first reading of Kurstak. Nussbaum presents some of the other approaches perhaps in a more straightforward manner in her book *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (2011). She mentions *The GDP Approach, The Utilitarian Approach and Resource-Based Approaches*. Next, in short, the three of these are going to be commented on.

GDP has been criticized so much as a measure of human well-being that its narrowness might already be obvious. However, as Nussbaum points out, the approach has its upsides: it is relatively easy to measure, and it has attractive transparency since monetary value of goods and services makes comparisons possible and it is harder for nations to falsify the data (Nussbaum, 2011. p. 47). Nevertheless, nowadays the GDP approach has been shown to be questionable in many ways. The quality of life cannot be measured in narrowly monetary terms, using a single average number rather than looking at distribution, for instance. Therefore, the GDP approach and other similar approaches that rest in the national average can give high development marks to countries that have within them enormous inequalities (both economic as well as racial, religious, ethnic, gender-based marginalization and dep-

rivation). Additionally, a single number tells little about the quality of life. Aspects that Nussbaum argues are crucial for people's well-being and somewhat distinct; longevity, health, education, political rights, environment quality and leisure time to name but a few. Nussbaum strongly suggests that since these important aspects are open to study they should be studied directly, as "real human importance is located not in GDP but elsewhere" (Nussbaum, 2011. pp. 47-50). I understand that by 'elsewhere' she means 'in eudaimonia', and by the aforementioned aspects, she means the capabilities, and how they could lead to true human happiness.

Another common economic approach measuring the quality of life is the *utilitarian approach*. The approach examines either average or total utility where 'happiness' is in a sense viewed as the satisfaction of preferences. It measures quality of life according to people's reported feelings, and the theory is even quite democratic as each person is counted as one. However, Nussbaum introduces a variety of problems with the utilitarian approach as a measure of quality of life. Firstly, even though these approaches look at satisfaction and not only wealth, similarly to the GDP approach, there is a problem with nations getting high average or total utilities if most of its people are doing well, regardless of how greatly some groups of people might be suffering. More importantly, the terms 'satisfaction' or 'pleasure' that are widely used by utilitarians suggest commensurability whereas real life suggests diversity and incommensurability. The approach has also been criticized due to the way research surveys have been conducted (people are deferential to authority and the way the questions are framed influences the answers). The third objection, that, according to Nussbaum, has been made famous by Sen and Jon Elster especially, draws attention to preferences and satisfactions. Preferences respond to social conditions and are claimed to be 'adaptive', and thus marginalized groups might identify and internalize their second-class status. Hence, we can see that an utilitarian approach might, in fact, reinforce the status quo no matter how unjust it might be. Nussbaum also claims that the utilitarian approaches are passivising and do not highlight the importance of freedom and choice as they focus on satisfaction as a goal. She strongly states that passive state of satisfaction is not an appropriate goal for human beings as there is a difference between a public policy that takes care of people and public policy that respects choice. (Nussbaum, 2011. pp. 51-56)

Also other, more egalitarian or sophisticated *Resource-Based Approaches* are criticized by Nussbaum. They are popular alternatives to the utilitarian approach as they are seen as

egalitarian versions of the GDP approach (according to which the more resources a country has, the better it does as long as it divides them equally enough among all citizens). Nussbaum, nevertheless thinks that this caring for distribution is not enough as income is simply not a good proxy for what people are able to do and to be as people have different needs for resources if they are to attain a same level of functioning. It is an especially bad proxy for social respect, nonhumiliation and inclusion. Hence, it appears to me that Nussbaum thinks that these resource-based approaches do not consider diversity or persistent social inequalities and thus can even say to reinforce the status quo. (Nussbaum, 2011. pp. 56-58)

Compared to the above mentioned other theories and measures of well-being, the Capabilities Approach provides a persuasive counter-paradigm. However, I am not suggesting that the Capabilities Approach is the only available counter-theory, nor am I claiming that it is necessarily the best one. In the previous section that dealt with the philosophical starting points and the value base of the approach, the human rights approaches were already mentioned as strongly related to the Capabilities Approach. One of the most well-known of these counter-theories of well-being – that again shares many common features with the Capabilities Approach – is the Gross National Happiness approach.

Gross National Happiness is a term formulated by Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Fourth King of Bhutan, in the 1970s. The concept, bearing similarity with the Capabilities Approach, indicates and suggests that sustainable development should take a more holistic approach towards notions of progress by giving equal importance to non-economic aspects of well-being. The concept of GNH has often been introduced and conceptualized by its four pillars: sustainable *socio-economic development*, *good governance*, *cultural preservation*, and *environmental conservation*. More recently, these four pillars have been further classified into nine domains in order to establish widespread understanding of GNH and GNH values. The nine domains again are: psychological well-being, education, health, time use, cultural diversity and resilience, community vitality, good governance, ecological diversity and resilience, and living standards. The domains represent the components of well-being, and the term ‘well-being’ in GNH approach refers to fulfilling conditions of a good life (the values and principles laid down by the concept of Gross National Happiness). The GNH Index has been developed in order to measure well-being and it utilizes multidimensional methodology. This single number index is constructed from 33 indicators categorized under the aforementioned nine domains. (The Centre for Bhutan Studies and GNH Research. 2014)

As a side note, interesting in GNH approach is the use of the word "happiness", a translation or a term I specifically criticized earlier when I introduced the Aristotelian concept of eudaimonia, which refers to a great deal more stable and holistic state of well-being. Perhaps it is, indeed, this word that bothers researchers and evokes criticism toward the GNH approach and rankings. It does sound rather vague and hard to define and measure again. Here, however, it needs to be noted that this is a rather Western way of viewing terms and concepts in academia. The research vocabulary is different in different academic cultures, and concepts such as 'happiness', 'faith' and 'humbleness', for instance, might be considered unscientific and highly subjective in the Western research tradition.

Continuing with the issue of subjectivity, similarly to people's experience of their capability, GDH could be said to depend on series of subjective judgments. Undoubtedly, these sorts of criticisms would be most likely posed by people who find GDP an easy, convenient international scale. It is easy to imagine how both the Capabilities Approach and the GNH-model are accused for making international comparisons of somewhat relative well-being rather problematic. However, well-being as a concept is problematic, relative, complex and holistic. Just because there is a tool such as GDP, easier to measure and to compare, does not mean that it serves the purpose. It is like someone providing you with a hammer when you needed a screwdriver. Also, even though I am not a universalist and carefully assess the criticism towards the universal nature of the Capabilities Approach, I hold that sometimes it appears that the markers of well-being are remarkably cross-cultural. Surely around the world, people report higher levels of satisfaction if they have strong social ties and access to education and health care, live in healthy environments, experience good governance etc. Having said this, by no means is the Western-Eastern division or cultural diversity (different conceptions of happiness, different epistemological viewpoints, different ways of knowing, different academic traditions or scientific vocabularies) disregarded in this thesis, when the theories of well-being are discussed. The applicability and the strength and potential of the Capabilities Approach are assessed in this thesis, which make the imagining of universal implementations mandatory.

These issues of cultural diversity and the claim of universalism shall be rediscussed in chapter 5 that deals with ethics and the trustworthiness of this research. Next, I am moving towards the operationalization of the approach and will present my reading of the Capabilities Approach in the context of basic education.



## 4 Operationalization of Capabilities in Education

*“At the heart of the Capabilities Approach since its inception has been the importance of education.”*

(Nussbaum, 2011. p. 152)

The significance of education for the Capabilities Approach is strongly present in Sen’s and Nussbaum’s writings, yet the actual implementation of the approach in the field of education is not covered in detail. This is only natural: the Capabilities Approach is a multi-disciplinary, cross-cutting, wide theory of well-being, that needs to touch upon a variety of issues on diverse fields. Also, the main contributors of the approach, whose writings are at the core of this thesis (Nussbaum, Sen, Kurstak), are not educational scientists.

Indeed, educators and educational scientists have not yet adopted the approach, at least I have not been able to find significant capabilities education literature for my thesis. This was, from the beginning, on one hand a great challenge, and on the other hand an interesting possibility for me to consider for this thesis. I would claim that – at least for now – there are no established ‘capabilities pedagogy’, ‘capabilities curricula’ or ‘capabilities teaching material’ in the same way there are resources, projects and curricula for human rights education, for instance. A great deal of further research on the Capabilities Approach could, indeed, be conducted in the field of education. I naturally hold that this approach has enormous potential in education, both in content and in educational philosophy, be it on a local-, global-, curricular- or on a classroom level.

In this following chapter, I shall shed light on what Nussbaum herself briefly says about capabilities and education. Then, I will introduce formal basic education as a context that I am mainly concerned with when I discuss the potential educational implementations of the approach. Lastly, I shall present certain educational phenomena I have most recently associated with the Capabilities Approach (Pedagogy of Care and Human Rights education guidelines), and by drawing from these, I suggest that the approach could be implemented

in basic education both in terms of content, and in terms of educational philosophy aiming at justice, dignity, well-being, and eudaimonia.

#### **4.1 Nussbaum on capabilities and education**

As was mentioned before, the main theorist of this thesis, Martha Nussbaum, is not an educational scholar, and hence she discusses education in quite a general manner, mainly commenting on its importance and potential for the operationalization of the Capabilities Approach. Nussbaum's approach, as well as her research background, is extremely interdisciplinary. Therefore perhaps, she suggests that the Capabilities Approach proposes unique methods for answering to a number of questions currently being faced by social and political theory, as cutting-edge work is being done by capabilities theory in diverse areas. (Nussbaum, 2011. p. 143). Even though her explanations must stay quite general, she claims that they demonstrate that her approach promises a new, and relatively unified perspective on problems frequently treated in isolation from one another (Nussbaum, 2011. p. 143). When she deals with these contemporary issues she claims that the approach could benefit, Nussbaum describes issues of disadvantage, gender, disability, age, care, animal entitlements – and of course education.

Education develops people's existing capacities into formed and functional, *internal capabilities* of diverse sorts. Nussbaum argues that this formation process is a source of lifelong satisfaction and thus valuable in itself. Education is also essential concerning the development exercise of multiple other human capabilities, it is a "fertile functioning" of the greatest importance in addressing disadvantage and inequality. It is a universally acknowledged fact that people who have been able to access basic education have highly improved their employment options, their possibilities for political participation, and their abilities to collaborate productively with others in society, on a local, national, and even global level. (Nussbaum, 2011. p. 152)

Nussbaum continues with this argument that education seems to have special salience in the pushes nations have made to promote human equality, and as a gender researcher, discusses the relevance of education for women's capabilities and rights improvement. She refers to different political documents and declarations when she illustrates how nations view education as human capability enhancement, using India and the United States as examples. In both of these countries, as in many other nations, education has been seen to

be particularly pivotal to human dignity, opportunity and equality. If these connections are tenable, as Nussbaum believes they are, then education, according to her, ought to have a key role in the Capabilities Approach. Hence, she holds that it is right and reasonable that education is also part of the Human Development Index, since it urges all nations to consider educational achievement as one of the most central elements of their national success. (Nussbaum, 2011. pp. 153-155)

However, as soon as national success in educational attainment is mentioned, it puts educators and researchers in a critical mindset. Nussbaum appears to share my worry by writing that the emphasis of many governmental interventions has been on basic numeracy and literacy. This is certainly understandable, and to some extent it is right to think that when these skills are missing, many routes to opportunities are shut. Nevertheless, we should not limit the analysis of education and capabilities to those skills. Nussbaum also acknowledges that a true education for human development requires much more than numeracy and literacy skills. (Nussbaum, 2011. pp. 154-155)

In fact, I dare say that no educator would think of basic literacy and numeracy skills to be sufficient when we address learning and human capability development. My thoughts and concerns in relation to capabilities enhancement and education are very similar to Nussbaum's in other aspects as well. Nussbaum points out that modern nations have been anxious about national profit and have concentrated increasingly on a set of marketable skills (Nussbaum, 2011. p. 155). I do not think that the Capabilities Approach's importance in multi-disciplinary, ethical and empathy-constructing education could have been put better in other words, so here is what Nussbaum writes:

*“The skills associated with the humanities and the arts – critical thinking, the ability to imagine and to understand other person's situation from within, and a grasp of world history and the current global economic order – are all essential for responsible democratic citizenship, as well as for a wide range of other capabilities that people might choose to exercise in later life. Users of Capabilities Approach need to attend carefully to issues of both pedagogy and content, asking how both the substance of studies and the nature of classroom interactions [...] fulfill the aims inherent in the approach, particularly with regard to citizenship.”*

(Nussbaum, 2011. pp. 155-156)

Good education demands sensitivity to context, and to different historical, cultural and economic circumstances. If the Capabilities Approach as a pedagogical mindset could help educators to develop critical, active, capable and participating citizens, who assess and enhance their own well-being, it would surely help us to address and engage in local issues as well as improve national happiness. However, I propose that our thinking must also always aim at the global level. Nussbaum says that in arranging good education, “It is not unreasonable to think that a cross-cultural dialogue, here as in the Capabilities Approach more generally, may yield general principles that can then be flexibly implemented in each nation and region.” (Nussbaum, 2011. p. 157). This is a worthwhile goal, but I would like to add to the reasons why we need cross-cultural dialogue, and draw even more attention to the potential cross-cultural dialogue could have in creating a value-shift and implementing the approach globally. Imagining these possibilities directs my thoughts to the momentous potential a Capability Approach-influenced pedagogy in compulsory basic education could have in combating global inequalities and injustices.

#### **4.2 Basic education as an institution**

*“Education is such a pivotal factor in opening up a wide range of adult capabilities that making it compulsory in childhood is justified by the dramatic expansion of capabilities in later life. Where children are concerned, then, the state’s commitment to the future capabilities of its citizens, together with its strong interest in having informed and capable citizens, justifies aggressive approach: compulsory primary and secondary education...”*

(Nussbaum, 2011. p. 156)

I have decided to discuss the Capabilities Approach’s potential to education from a point of view of formal, compulsory basic education. Because I see this as the most comprehensive form of education, as well as most universal, I also see the most potential in it and regard it as a single most powerful educational establishment. In the following, basic education as a

concept shall be concisely defined, and its universal potential and meaningfulness will be briefly looked at in terms of the Millennium Development Goals.

What is actually meant by basic education? The term is often used without definitions, as if it is something self-evident. Basic as a word refers to something fundamental and essential, and the first years of basic education are, in fact, in an English speaking world referred to as ‘primary education’ or ‘elementary education’. Hermeneutically, we could perhaps start from a pre-existing notion of basic education, before examining different definitions. Here, let us begin with an idea that basic education is something necessary, something for all, something compulsory (often guaranteed by law), something more or less universal and something vital for developing people’s basic capabilities. Next, as certain definitions are proposed, we can perceive that these initial associations are more or less accurate or corresponding.

Evoh & Mafu (2007) strongly rely on UNESCO’s documents when they define basic education, but want to also point out that there are societal and inter-generational variations when it comes to the level of formal education that may be considered ‘basic’. Frequently, basic education has been defined as education intended to answer to essential learning needs, thus it consists of instruction at the foundation level, on which ensuing learning can be based. This first form of formal education, is meant for everybody “regardless of age, social and economic background, gender and residence” (United Nation Education and Scientific Organization [UNESCO], 1990, p. 1, as cited by Evoh & Mafu, 2007. p. 429). According to UNESCO, the process of basic education starts by supplying Early Childhood Education for all children in urban as well as rural settings. This form of education ought to be holistic in order to sustain the appropriate development and growth of children. (Evoh & Mafu, 2007. pp. 429-430)

UNESCO accurately points out that the definition of education is no longer established or decided by the state alone. In various cases, the expectations of society, the economy, as well as that of families, along with the knowledge coming from outside the formal education system, have caused the educational evolution when it comes to both content and duration (UNESCO, 1990, p. 1, as cited by Evoh & Mafu, 2007. p. 429). In general aspects, basic education supplies learners the essential, elementary skills and knowledge necessary in life. Basic education provides the favourable circumstances for intellectual independ-

ence, integration into professional life, personal development, and participation in the improvement of the society in the context of democracy. (Evoh & Mafu, 2007. pp. 429-430.)

Tilson and Yates (2002) also attempt to define basic education, and similarly to Evoh & Mafu, acknowledge that the term has societal and situational variations and it is used to refer to different things by different people. They write that one solution to this problem would be to say that basic education is what normally occurs during the first nine years of schooling, but suggest that this would be unduly simplistic. On the contrary, they propose that basic education refers to education for both children and for adults, covering primary education programmes and programmes corresponding to primary, and in cases of some nations, junior secondary education. Basic education, in this definition, also comprises those programmes with alternative curricula. (Tilson & Yates, 2002. p. 7)

The significance of basic education in the operationalization of the Capabilities Approach, and the enhancement of human well-being and equity, could be considered and assessed from the perspective of Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These are strongly linked to UNDP's Human Development Indexes that, as was mentioned, have their base in Sen's and Nussbaum's capabilities writings. I think these also shed light on how universally education's significance in improving well-being is viewed. Basic Education Coalition phrased this significance rather well on their website. According to the organization: "Education has the power to transform the lives of individuals and the prospects of nations. Education fundamentally influences who we are, what we know, how we think, and what we can do. Quality basic education, particularly for girls, directly impacts all factors of human development..." (Basic Education Coalition, 2014).

Basic Education Coalition is an organization that is working in order to enlarge funding and support for quality basic education globally. The objective of the coalition is to promote equitable, expanded access to basic education by advancing progress toward the EFA goals, and the MDGs that concern education. The Millennium Development Goals are eight goals that acknowledge and attempt to answer the world's main development challenges. These goals should be achieved by 2015. The MDGs were set up in the Millennium Declaration that was approved by 189 nations and signed by 147 heads of state and governments during the United Nations' Millennium Summit in 2000. The most meaningful goal in terms of education is the second one, according to which everyone should achieve

universal primary education. This goal aims to ensure that by 2015, all children, boys and girls around the world, finish a full term of primary schooling. (Basic Education Coalition, 2014.)

Clearly, these goals are quite ambitious, yet by no means enough concerning the topic of his thesis. Educators, researchers and policy makers seem to be unanimous about the fact, that we cannot merely concern ourselves with quantitative enrollment, but that the quality of education needs to be of most importance. The fact that different governments and organizations seem to universally agree that basic education is vital and that every person should have an access to it (as a fundamental right), does not yet prove its significance to the development of Central Human Capabilities. The fact why I wanted to introduce basic education as the educational context concerning in this thesis, is its universality. Formal schooling, basic education (no matter how difficult it might be to define, since there is no ahistorical, acultural education) is globally the most central form of education. In addition, I view it as an enormously important institution, responsible for the enhancement of human capabilities and people's well-being. As I have articulated before, Nussbaum is calling for institutions' responsibility in operationalization of the Capabilities Approach, and I suggest that if basic education as a whole is seen as an institution, its potential to the operationalization is gigantic.

### **4.3 Possible operationalization: Equity, human rights and the pedagogy of care**

*“Give all students what all students need: genuine opportunities to explore the questions central to human life”*

(Noddings, 2005. p. 174).

Nel Noddings is an esteemed educational scholar and a Professor of Education Emerita at Stanford University. She has devoted most of her research on extended work on caring, and the development of the pedagogy of care. Noddings insists that the main objective of education should be a moral one, that of being responsible for the growth of competent caring, loving, and lovable persons. To that end, she describes in great detail a curriculum organized around centres of care: care for one's self; for intimate others as well as

strangers and distant others; for animals, plants and the earth, and for human instruments and ideas. I think this is remarkably similar to some of Nussbaum's aims, and hence decided to familiarize myself more profoundly with Noddings's work. I am not going to go into much detail regarding this specific pedagogy, but shall bring out some examples, and mention that my reading of Noddings has been influential when it comes to my own capabilities-based educational philosophy in this research.

According to Noddings, the philosopher Martin Heidegger described care as the very being of human life. His use of the term is quite expansive, and from his perspective, we are immersed in care and it is the ultimate reality of life. As was discussed earlier, Aristotelian thought puts a great deal of emphasis on human beings' rational activity – as does Nussbaum with her central capability of practical reason. However, if we decide, similarly to Heidegger and Noddings, that “the capacity to care is as much a mark of personhood as reason or rationality, then we will want to find ways to increase this capacity” (Noddings, 2005. p. 24).

Starting from that initial idea, Noddings constructs the main arguments of her pedagogy of care. Her first thesis is that there are centers of care and concern which all people share and in which the capacities of all children must be promoted and further developed. The second thesis follows the first one closely and asserts that education should nurture the special cognitive capacities of all children. This, for Noddings, requires a scheme of multiple intelligences. The third thesis suggests that the focus on centres of care and the development of capacities has to be completed with a consideration of differences that are associated with race, gender, ethnicity, and religion. The various perspectives that arise ought to be approached and handled respectfully, regularly and critically. (Noddings, 2005. p. 62)

Here I would like to highlight the importance of critical thinking in education, in general, but also in the context of social justice, civic perspective (improving the communities in which we live) and the Capabilities Approach. Noddings calls for critical considerations of differences and one's own position in the world. Critical thinking shall be defined by using one of Noddings's own definitions from a different book, according to which, in quite a broad sense critical thinking is rarely differentiated from reflective thinking. It “refers not only to the assessment of arguments(that will certainly be included) but also to the diligent and skillful use of reason on matters of moral/social importance – on personal decision making, conduct, and belief...[- -] caring and affect will always be factors in the applica-



tion of critical thinking”(Noddings, 2006. p. 4) I think that here, if we consider critical thinking skills and the pedagogy of care, we would be at the core of skills, attitudes and values needed for the operationalization of the Capabilities Approach in schools. However, it should be remembered that by no means is the aim of critical thinking to lead to cynicism: there are risks involved in trying to teach critical thinking skills directly, as creative thinking might suffer, and after all, the aim is to encourage passionate personal engagement as well as critical thinking (Noddings, 2006. p. 33). The two need not be held as mutually exclusive.

In addition to caring, and in relation to critical thinking that was just discussed, Noddings introduces another important function of the schools that I think is important to the Capabilities Approach. She suggests that schools’ function is to encourage a reflective examination of one’s own life – as an individual, as a member of a particular race, as a member of an economic class or as a member of any particular group (Noddings, 2005. p. 136). People of all groups should have a sense of both responsibility and efficacy and the emphasis needs to be on organization, locating issues, setting priorities and compromising to mutual advantage (Noddings, 2005. p. 136). This is a rather Freirean thought and Noddings, in fact, mentions Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed right after these statements. This pedagogy is very closely linked to the empowerment and the mutual advantage and equity and combating global injustices. Hence, I think that Freire’s Pedagogy could be extremely interesting and useful from the point of view of Capabilities Approach as well. I am acquainted with Freire’s work, but have decided not to study concepts such as power and emancipation in the context of the operationalization of the Capabilities Approach, even though they are all related in the web of meanings in the field of education and social justice. I, however suggest that there might be a possibility for a further study of the topic.

Similarly to Noddings, Martha Nussbaum also discusses unequal opportunity, disabilities, care and inclusion. I suggest that her views are strongly related to the themes of Education for All, and Noddings’ pedagogy of care. Nussbaum observes that “An urgent problem of justice that is only now beginning to be confronted by modern societies is how to promote the capabilities of people with a wide range of physical and mental disabilities.” (Nussbaum, 2011. p. 149). This, in a sense, is taking us back to the social inclusion and social contract that I discussed when I was mirroring Nussbaum’s approach to Rawls’s theory of justice. One facet of this problem of justice is that of strengthening the capabilities of people with disabilities on a basis of equal respect, while the other key aspect is pondering on

care work (Nussbaum, 2011. p. 151). Disability, similarly to childhood, requires a considerable human contribution in care. Nussbaum points out that currently most of this work is being done by women – and a great deal of it without pay – and proposes that solving this problem has several aspects, but first of all the public sphere would need to support the family, medical leave and in-home nursing care (Nussbaum, 2011. pp. 151-152).

Here, I would also bring in education. Basic education should be capability enhancing, and thus encourage students to improve themselves and their well-being, but also to take care of the well-being of other people, their environment, plants and the animal world. I suggest that voluntary care work (be it environmental, communal or human care) could be made a part of basic education curricula. Care work requires great human investment, and I would argue, teaches us something about humanity and empathy. Should it then not be part of basic education of human beings? Does the pedagogy of care not aim at caring environments that would create more caring in the future?

Noddings definitely takes a stand on this, when she talks about caring in her *Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*. She writes:

*“Some schools, recognizing the need just discussed, have instituted requirements for a form of community service. This is a move in the right direction, but reflection produces some issues to worry about. The practice provided must be with people who can demonstrate caring. We do not want our children to learn the menial (or even sophisticated) skills of care giving without the characteristic attitude of caring.”*

(Noddings, 2005. p. 24).

In relation to that citation, I would like to point out, that even though I hold the acquisition of skills immensely important for the capabilities development, they can be viewed, in a sense, as a framework. A framework, in which, the actual acquisition of skills, as well as knowledge, values and attitudes can take place. Values and attitudes in education, especially, are the key in the advancement of equity, care, and the Capabilities Approach.

Equity as a concept was already mentioned in the previous chapter of this thesis. Capabilities authors, as well as Noddings, tend to use the word equality when they write about the

importance of combating the inequalities of opportunity, even though, according to my reading and interpretation, they indeed frequently mean equity.

According to Grubb & Al. (2005), equity in education could be defined by its close synonym fairness. Inequality in education — whether inequality is measured by differences in measures of learning (i.e. test scores), measures of educational attainment (as in years completed), or more abstract ideas (such as opportunity) — is to a certain extent an issue of equity. Equity in education has been a matter of importance and concern for almost all nations, regardless of their status as developed, transitional, or in the process of developing (Grubb & Al., 2005. p. 8). Furthermore, educational inequality and its various consequences are seldom entirely random. Consistently, some groups are affected by educational inequality more than others. These groups also vary among nations: in many countries, girls have much less access to education than boys; immigrants, or racial and ethnic minorities, may suffer lower levels of schooling; children of low income or socio-economic status usually do not do as well as their middle-income or middle-class peers; and there may be regional differences that are of importance. Also, “Group inequality may be more serious than inequality that can be attributed to random elements, or to individual attributes like energy, motivation, and ambition that are thought to be randomly distributed within the population.” (Grubb & Al., 2005. pp. 8-9)

Another direction the capabilities education could be approached from, is the implementation of the United Nation’s Child Rights in schools. This could be examined as one example of bringing philosophy and theory into educational realities and school practices. As has already been established, the Capabilities Approach shares a great deal of common ground with the global human rights approach and the UN’s declarations. Since there is not yet that much research conducted on how the Capabilities Approach could be operationalised through educational practices, a study of Human Rights education materials might be useful. UNICEF (2014) has sketched a *Child Rights Education Toolkit* for teaching of human rights in schools, and some key aspects of this toolkit are briefly introduced next.

In the foreword of the *Child Rights Education Toolkit*, Leena Pakkala, the director of private fundraising and partnership for UNICEF, summarizes the core aspects of child rights education, and suggests that it ought to be understood in a broad sense, far beyond the subject of a lesson plan. Their approach involves teaching and learning about the provisions

and principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) along with the ‘child rights approach’. The aim and the argument is, that together, these would help empower both children and adults to act and put children’s rights into practice in their lives – at home, at school, in the community and, eventually, at the national and global levels. According to Pakkala, child rights education advances the vision that the child should be totally prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of dignity, freedom, peace, tolerance, equality and solidarity. Child rights education is seen as a vital instrument for changing how children’s rights are perceived and applied in society. It aims to build especially the capacity of children to claim their rights, and the capacity of duty-bearers to perform their obligations. It attempts to provide encouragement and the space for meaningful participation and sustained civic engagement. (UNICEF, 2014. p.6)

Another useful aspect of child rights education is that it is seen as “*learning about rights*, learning *through rights* (using rights as an organizing principle to transform the culture of learning) and learning *for rights* (taking action to realize rights)” (UNICEF, 2014. p. 6). Perhaps, if we used the UNICEF model, and transformed it into education that would enhance the Capabilities Approach, we could consider learning about capabilities in the context of a broad, relevant and inclusive, curriculum. Learning *through* the Capabilities Approach would have to do with the practices, learning, assessment, learning environments, educational philosophy, values etc. We would also need to include things such as rights-, functionings-, and capabilities-based learning and assessment, respect for others, respect for the environment, students participation, identity, choice and integrity. This is held as the most central part of the operationalization, so naturally the list could go on and on. Learning for the Capabilities Approach, then again, would aim at a further social change and transformation of local communities and global environments. Here we can see links to activity theory and the original aim of Nussbaum and Sen, which is creating central human capabilities and fighting global injustices.

All in all, I propose that we arrive to a rather good idea of the relevance of the Capabilities Approach and its relatedness to basic education if we utilize the definition of basic learning needs the Jomtien forum has outlined:

*“Both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes)*

*required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions and to continue learning....”*

(WCEFA, 1990, Article 1. As cited by Tilson & Yates, 2002. p. 7)

Conclusively, it could be stated that the Capabilities Approach's potential significance for basic education (and vice versa) is remarkable and it could be studied more. Basic education can be seen as an institution that has a role and potential in promoting and enabling human capabilities, well-being and equity. The Capabilities Approach could also be seen on multiple levels of basic education; in school policies, on a classroom level, on curricular level and in the so-called physical school. In addition to this, there is larger, more structural, socio-developmental level, where basic education is seen as a powerful institution with opportunities towards social change. Interestingly enough, unlike many institutions, education can be seen as both an external, enabling factor in developing of human capabilities, but also, in the micro level context of education (schooling), it has potential in the development of individual innate capabilities.

## **5 Assessment and Ethical Considerations**

In this chapter, the final, more evaluative reflections of the Capabilities Approach will take place. I will begin with the assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the Capabilities Approach, introducing the critique towards its trustworthiness and believability. Then, the trustworthiness of this thesis and some ethical aspects of this research shall be discussed, all of which mainly have to do with the researcher's position in a hermeneutical qualitative theoretical inquiry such as this thesis.

### **5.1 Strengths and weaknesses of the Capabilities Approach**

I am convinced that examining the counter arguments and the critique towards Nussbaum's foundational project (and the capabilities approach in general) is crucial for my hermeneutical circle, and for the development of proper understanding of the theory. It is important for me to ethically view a socio-political theory, if I argue for its possible implementation in education. The counter arguments that to me seem to be the most salient and severe and troublesome will be hence presented in the following.

As I have been arguing while opening up the Capabilities Approach in this thesis, the approach is seen by many researchers and practitioners as a well-argued, relatively strong, theoretical construction in a wider counter-paradigm. I have already mentioned that the approach has been critiqued for certain reasons. In the following, I am going to present some of this criticism. Once again, I shall be referring to Nussbaum, Sen and especially Kurstak (who extensively assesses the Capabilities Approach) while defending the trustworthiness and the need for this counter-theory.

When Kurstak talks about the requirements for the standardized account of the capabilities metric, he claims that Nussbaum's foundational project does not inherit some of the difficulties proper to Sen's version (as I mentioned previously, Sen is the architect of the approach, but he has not carried out the operationalization, nor has it been his aim). Kurstak mentions three characteristics of the Capabilities Approach that shield it from critique (Kurstak, 2013. p. 69). Even though the approach's applicability in standardized well-being measurement (i.e. the 'capabilities metric') is not the main interest of this thesis, I think that the strengths that Kurstak has observed support the way I view the approach, and

sustain the Capabilities Approach in general. There are three distinct characteristics that could be argued to make the theory, let us say, less problematic or controversial:

*“First of all, the number of possible capabilities is limited solely to Nussbaum’s central list, together with any possible sub-capabilities and functionings that may exist along its many layers, as required strictly for full operationalization. Secondly, there is no problem related to multiple lists and capability ordering, valuing, and weighing in order to organize them along a proper hierarchal scale, insofar as all capabilities present on the list remain incommensurable, irreplaceable (no trade-offs) amongst themselves, and are all required as a set for proper minimal levels of social justice to be attained. Thirdly, valuation exercises are simply not needed, seeing as how the central human capabilities list is already considered to be, in itself, morally justified (- -) Hence, the dreaded scenario of a quasi-unlimited number of possible capabilities spread across a significant number of mutually incompatible capabilities lists, all requiring proper valuation and positioning along hierarchal orderings, is simply not something to be envisaged for Nussbaum’s foundational project.”*

(Kurstak, 2013. pp. 69-70)

Although Kurstak brings up some significant strengths in Nussbaum’s Capabilities Approach, as has been stated earlier, there are elements in the capabilities theory that make it vague and hard to grasp. Furthermore, some of the strengths Kurstak introduces above can also be seen as weaknesses, if the operationalization of the central capabilities by different institutions and governments is the primary goal of the approach. He speculates that the to an extent inconsistent use of the various capabilities-related terms, as well as the many further refinements to the central conceptual core make the Ten Central Human Capabilities and the Capabilities Approach a rich and highly flexible one. However, he is concerned that under a very heavy conceptual load, the practical operationalization of the Ten Central Human Capabilities (the ‘capabilities metric’) would become impossible.” (Kurstak, 2013. p. 73)

In this thesis some of the critique towards the Capabilities Approach has already been addressed, and in order to avoid unnecessary repetition, shall not be explained again in great

detail. One example of this already mentioned critique is the claim that the approach, and especially the terminology associated with it, is needlessly confusing. As has been established, I agree with Kurstak that the term capability should only be used when, in fact, referring to *combined capabilities*, genuine freedom units. This is for the purpose of overcoming the identified ambiguity and confusion with the terminology.

Kurstak groups the capabilities critique thematically where the first group includes diverse charges of vagueness. These charges claim that in the Capabilities Approach, the suggested object of distribution (Ten Central Human Capabilities) cannot be applied, because it is extremely complex and at times contradictory. A proper and profitable analysis of the theoretical contents of capabilities end up being conceptually burdensome and rather difficult to put into practice. However, even though the respective idea of capabilities is theoretically difficult to grasp and to perform, Sen and Nussbaum stay consistent in their writings and a successful reconstruction and an understanding can be achieved by examining their initial writings dealing with this approach. In addition, it is possible to conquer the initial concerns (appearing in the salient literature) concerning the theoretical believability of the capabilities approach, by pointing out the important ways in which models of operationalization have flourished rather successfully in many ways and in many environments. (Kurstak, 2013. p. 7)

It needs to be pointed out that by these various models of operationalization, according to my reading, here Kurstak mainly refers to different ways of implementing the approach in quantitative measurements of well-being. These sorts of models of operationalization, however, have not been of the utmost interest of this thesis and, I claim that they should also be questioned. I am not addressing capabilities measurements here, as measuring well-being sounds rather positivist which does not associate well with my epistemological starting points. I am doubtful about ‘measuring’ well-being with quantitative methods, and this research is a qualitative hermeneutical analysis of the Capabilities Approach. However, I am not suggesting that these sort of quantitatively applied capabilities metres would be of no use anywhere. Indeed, Kurstak appears to be convinced about the standardized account of the capabilities metric, and states that the positive thing about it is that “the distributive object proposed by the capabilities approach remains comprehensive, as well as sufficiently flexible and multivalent in order for it to function quite effectively at the centre of Nussbaum’s proposed list of central human capabilities”(Kurstak, 2013. P 7-8).



Another group of arguments made against the capabilities approach deals with power and structures of the societies, and it could be called the utopia claim. This group of arguments concerns the Capabilities Approach's supposedly severe neglect of the nature of power-relations in society, and the manner in which this strongly threatens the many prescriptions made by the capability theorists. Kurstak proposes that this would call for a triangle of alert individuals, authentic information and appropriate institutional protection to assist in the practical application of the foundational project. When it comes to the global implementation of the capabilities approach in a power political sense, Kurstak states that "Global capability implementation will need to be done by way of local regimes in concordance with required actions undertaken by the international community when need be, insofar as the stage is simply not set (as of yet) for a one-world foundational project-based government." (Kurstak, 2013. pp. 10-11)

The next group of arguments claims that Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach is morally dubious. According to Kurstak, Nussbaum has defended her approach by saying that it has already been 'validated' by many people around the world, and that the project could eventually be globally validated in the future. Even though Kurstak observes that appeal to popularity or belief is a poor argumentative basis, the idea is not that most people would agree with the foundational project, but that it would be 'for good reasons'. It seems obvious that "the possibility of a global overlapping consensus on the moral desirability of the foundational project constitutes a crucial aspect of one being able to defend it adequately". (Kurstak, 2013. p. 124)

Nevertheless, as Kurstak reminds us, there is no evidence that a global overlapping consensus on the moral desirability actually exists. He also goes into ethical considerations of Nussbaum's work, questioning whether the poor Indian women, interviewed by Nussbaum, actually understood her while they 'allegedly agreed' with the items on her list, or whether the individuals who may have had something to contribute were left out because of incompatibility (Kurstak, 2013. p. 125). To me these seem rather severe accusations. Kurstak does in fact question Nussbaum's claim that her list is derived from drawing "both on the results of cross-cultural academic discussion and on discussions in women's groups themselves designed to exemplify certain values of equal dignity, non-hierarchy, and nonintimidation" (Nussbaum, 2000. p. 151, as cited by Kurstak, 2013. p. 125) Kurstak asks the question, every self-respecting researcher interpreting a theory should: "who was really chosen to participate in these conferences and *for what reasons?*" (Kurstak, 2013. p. 126).

There are four *relativistic* counterarguments against Nussbaum's foundational project that have been observed by several capability theorists, but summarized and brought together rather successfully by Kurstak. Relativistic in this context means, that the arguments presented below make claims that "another culture's conceptual framework is inadequate to properly assess their own, without also (necessarily) adhering wholesale to relativism as a comprehensive ethical theory" (Kurstak, 2013. p. 128). Some of this relativistic confusion might also be due to Nussbaum's anti-essentialist worldview (Nussbaum, 1992. pp. 203-205, as cited by Kurstak, 2013 p. 128).

The first relative counterargument introduced here is the *charge of imperialism*, claiming that

*"the foundational project is nothing more than a form of neo-colonialism, bringing distinctly foreign ideas and values, simply unsuited to another culture, and (possibly) attempting to slip on a new noose of oppression or class domination on the indigenous population, by proposing an appealing yet wholly inadequate ethical-political theory of the good"*

(Kurstak,2013. p. 128).

Even though this to me sounds a very real concern and clearly stemming from a genuine worry (taken into consideration the West's colonial past and the Western academic hegemony in all sciences, not the least on the field of socio-political studies), examination of the Ten Central Human Capabilities list makes me lean towards theorists – mainly Nussbaum– who defend the approach against this criticism.

In fact, according to these theorists, many of these supposedly 'western' concepts are not actually western at all, but can be found in many colonized cultures, occasionally more developed and at an earlier date than in the West. Interestingly, the anti-western rhetoric is said to be favoured amongst various groups that have a vested interest in ideas that would threaten their power and privileges. Kurstak, hence, points out that this charge of imperialism dawns with highly dubious arguments, and moves towards and even more dubious conclusion. (Kurstak, 2013. p. 129)

Furthermore, concerning this charge of imperialism and Western hegemony, as has already been mentioned, the Capabilities Approach takes influences from different cultures. Nussbaum claims that the relevant initiative ideas exist possibly in all cultures. She adds that today theoretical work and research on Capabilities Approach is conducted enthusiastically by scholars from many different traditions and nations, noticeably including researchers from non-Euro-American traditions, which demonstrates that the approach has wide appeal and support. (Nussbaum, 2011. p.124)

The second relativistic counterargument is *the charge of paternalism* according to which rational human beings can make their own judgments on what is good for them, and that a theory such as the Capabilities Approach, imposing a universal core of human capabilities on people – whether requested or not – displays a lack of respect for people’s autonomy as responsible and free agents in the world (Kurstak, 2013. p. 129). To me this issue of individual agency is important and the charge of paternalism seems a highly valid argument. When I have been discussing the topic of my thesis with people, some have asked “why is such a list needed?” Similarly to the UN Declaration on Human Rights, the Central Human Capabilities can be viewed utopic, western, morally and philosophically questionable and, indeed, paternalising.

According to Kurstak, even Nussbaum herself shows some uneasiness when dealing with this argument. Her uneasiness stems from the tension between the approach and her strong liberal values, emphasizing personal autonomy and freedom of choice. What makes this consideration even more problematic is how connected so-called ‘choice’ can be with desires that are tricky in themselves, or even bad to human living. However, so far the charge of paternalism has not been successfully proved. It can, indeed, be asked whether a fair and reasonable form of paternalism such as the one required by the Capabilities Approach, actually offends the real autonomous rights of various and diverse people or groups in inadmissible ways. (Kurstak, 2013, pp. 129-131). Once again, the underlying purpose and the main goal is to find a balance between exaggerated state control and interference leading to injustice, and letting individuals get completely out of control with what they believe they ought to be left free to do. (Kurstak, 2012. pp. 129-131)

The third counter argument is the *argument from culture* claiming that, in fact, around the world can be found norms for living worthy and good lives that are essentially incompatible with the norms of the Capabilities Approach. This is strongly related to the ethnocen-

trism that was already discussed above, and the arguments defending the Capabilities Approach are similar as well. Nussbaum goes into great extents demonstrating how many of these norms are steeped in structures of cultural oppression, power struggles and vested interests. Additionally, she points out that cultures are ever-changing phenomena, and that their nature is dynamic. They are not static forces immune to external, or for that matter, internal, influences. Consequently, any argument from a cultural perspective would be highly dubious, since there are no actually separate, disparate and isolated cultures in the world anymore. Nor are there cultures that follow practices that are eternally fixed in time. Even if this was the case, far better grounds for justifying the legitimacy of the alternative norms would be needed, in order to construct equally-credible, comprehensive theories of the good. Mere references to culture, tradition or religion – or some other forms of claims to authority – according to Nussbaum, are not sufficient. (Kurstak, 2013. P-132-133)

I am somewhat convinced that what Nussbaum and Kurstak argue is valid; the Capabilities Approach and the 10 Central Human Capabilities indeed are rather universal and cross-culturally influenced. I also hold that there is a great deal of room for different cultures in the theory, and consider that the justifications Nussbaum provides for her theory are so strong that they should –so to speak – be enough. However, I cannot completely agree on the claim that there are no distinct cultures in the world anymore, as there are cases of some unknown, rather isolated cultures (i.e. indigenous cultures), and cultures that simply prefer to reject any external influences posed on them. However, I think that this is not the most important consideration in relation to the main argument for justification. I propose that Nussbaum might also be right about the issue of vested interest, since the Capabilities Approach should not offend any freedoms (individual nor communal) or human rights.

The fourth counter argument, *argument from diversity*, is continuation to the third one, as it is so closely related to the one from culture. It is build around the belief that there is intrinsic worth in the cultural diversity encountered around the world today, and that suffocating this diversity somehow is simply indefensible (Kurstak, 2013. p. 133). To comment on this notion from my own researcher's perspective, I am, in general, a supporter of multiculturalism, and ontologically could propose that I see perhaps even intrinsic value in diversity. Hence, I am somewhat guarded when Kurstak argues that “just because some practices and customs arose and exist today, does not mean that they should continue to do that in the future” (Kurstak, 2013. p. 134). However, even though I promote locality (place-based education, for instance) in this global boom, and believe that the concerns of globalization

diminishing cultural diversity are very genuine, I also agree with Kurstak that “it is highly irresponsible to argue for a merely blindsided preservation of said diversity, without due examination of the respective value of each of its constitutive practices and customs” (Kurstak, 2013. p. 133). Also, like Nussbaum repeatedly points out in her writings, human rights, well-being, functioning, equality and capabilities have intrinsic value as well. Ultimately, it could be concluded that the Capabilities Approach is not against multiculturalism and diversity as such, but rather it is against certain elements that can be universally viewed as morally unacceptable.

As Kurstak points out in the conclusion and reflection of these counter arguments, they do propose very real risks for the Capabilities Approach. In the worst case, it could be subverted into another justificatory tool for racist and totalitarian regimes. Furthermore this approach can easily be seen as another ethical-political product that is simply ‘too good to be true’, and its critics rightly express skepticism against it baring in mind the West’s colonial past. However, as Kurstak beautifully sums up, Nussbaum’s approach is not problem-free, but it would seem that there exists “no knock-down arguments that would imply that the foundational project is a theoretically impractical, morally dubious, or practically dangerous distributive theory of justice to implement” (Kurstak, 2013. p. 11).

For me Nussbaum has made her standpoint, her philosophical and theoretical influences, as well as her ontological starting points clear. She, along with Sen, Kurstak, Cohen and other counter-theorists is calling for a change in thinking, especially in the thinking of well-being. In addition to change in thinking, she is calling for actual change and nations’, institutions’ and global stakeholders’ responsibility in enabling this change and providing all the people with the important capabilities, and thus, to the least, the minimal level of justice. Even though I propose that especially the list of Ten Central Human Capabilities should be left open for discussion (and the question why exactly ten needs to be asked), I cannot but agree that a counter-paradigm is needed when we consider well-being in today’s world. The Capabilities Approach offers a persuasive one. I am going to conclude this discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the approach with Kurstak’s words that have a sound of a conclusive final assessment:

*“Nussbaum’s foundational project presently has at its disposal a remarkable framework to work with, which can serve as an effective launching pad for further development. This being said, the two main recognizable areas where operationalization of the foundational project can still flounder include the very broad multiple realizability implicit by the ‘thick and vague’ nature of Nussbaum’s central human capabilities list, together with the fact that severe cases of disability, as well as resource-cripping natural disasters, can come to seriously undermine its effectiveness.”*

(Kurstak, 2013. p. 73)

## **5.2 On trustworthiness and the ethics of the research**

Qualitative research in the field of social sciences needs to deal with particular issues of ethics and trustworthiness due to the epistemological starting points, the nature of the research and the research tradition. In the following, I attempt to mention some of the general considerations on trustworthiness that are relevant to this thesis, as well as some more specific considerations the Capabilities Approach and my research questions request me to reflect upon.

First of all, the methodological considerations and starting points of this thesis shall be revisited in order to illustrate that the main issue of trustworthiness deals with the subjective and interpretative nature of qualitative, hermeneutical research where the reader’s position and the researcher’s role are highly significant. According to Syrjälä (2014), in qualitative research the validity of the research (how well-founded it is and how it corresponds to the ‘reality’) is often paid more attention to than the reliability (consistency, accuracy) of the research (Syrjälä, 2014). There is inconsistency amongst the researchers when it comes to the use of terminology and to the ideas of how these concepts should be applied in social science research. However, the shared starting point for qualitative researchers seems to be the idea of relational epistemology. According to this view, there is no such thing as universal truth, but knowledge and the criteria of knowledge are socially constructed and alterable (Syrjälä, 2014). This already suggests that researchers (myself here included) are not trying to establish facts or find the absolute ‘truth’, but rather shed light on a certain phenomenon by the way of interpretation.

Both Syrjälä and Metsämuuronen (2006) remind the researchers that there is no value-free or objective research (Syrjälä 2014. Metsämuuronen, 2006. p. 23) No matter what kind of data is used and how it is collected (this already is a validity issue, at least in my Master's thesis), it needs to be analysed, thus someone is always interpreting it (Syrjälä, 2014). As the role of researcher's interpretation is so central in qualitative research, the researcher can never distance oneself completely from the research topic – it might not even be desirable. This, again, raises the question of credibility or trustworthiness.

To me it seems that the best way to avoid pitfalls, and to make one's research as trustworthy as possible, is to make one's paradigm, research position, stance, underlying assumptions, preconceptions, expectations, change-agenda, values and epistemological starting points as transparent as possible. Clive Seale, amongst many, also talks about this and encourages researchers to be honest with the reader when it comes to their own ideologies or personal backgrounds (Seale, 2014. p. 25). Metsämuuronen calls for the critical viewing of one's own work, and underlines how essential it is that researchers on all academic levels are able to critically review and evaluate (their) literature, methodologies and research findings, and hence form their own opinion about the reliability and the validity of their research (Metsämuuronen, 2006. p. 24). To continue with these suggestions, it could be said that in hermeneutics, the researcher's position is perhaps even more crucial than in many other research methods. As stated earlier, it is a vital part of hermeneutics to understand that it is a *method for interpretation* of the text or a theory. Hence it becomes crucial that the researcher states one's own position clearly and makes one's biases as visible as possible (Patton, 2002. p. 115).

I propose that I have acknowledged my researcher's position in the writing process of this Master's thesis, and I have certainly attempted to carry this out in the process of reading and re-reading the texts on capabilities theory. In relation to my ontological and epistemological starting points and the situational view of the human being, I would like to, once more, acknowledge the situation and the cultural reality where I myself as a researcher exist in. The major bias that cannot and should not be ignored, that is relevant in any research but perhaps especially in this thesis, where universality and cultural diversity are the issues of critical concern, is my own cultural background. My researcher's position is strongly affected by my Western origins, in ways of thinking and in the ways of thinking academically especially. I already earlier mentioned my concerns about viewing concepts such as 'happiness' as unscientific. Although one can attempt to ignore one's potential

biases, cultural backgrounds cannot be dismissed. I have been brought up in Finland, Northern Europe, while I am interpreting a well-being theory constructed by a North-American feminist researcher. We are both, however, drawing from the writings of different theorists from versatile academic backgrounds from all continents. Conclusively it could be said that these biases exist, however, how the biases are viewed can be discussed. While it would be naïve to claim to be conducting an objective research, acknowledging one's position and constantly reflecting upon the traces of Eurocentric thoughts rather than denying one's background is an important step towards the never-attained objectivity. Also, what needs to be addressed, is that the theoretical field of this topic is colossal, and in addition to my subjective reading of the theory, I have managed to merely scratch the surface of the phenomenon by having properly familiarized myself only with a fraction of the existing sources.

Another consideration that I faced in the process of writing this thesis related to the trustworthiness and the credibility, was the constant feeling of genuine ambiguity of the topic and the main concepts of the thesis, since the concepts, indeed, were somewhat big, philosophical and, at times, hard to grasp. I strongly support and relate to Sen when he describes how he has dealt with the genuine ambiguities in the concept of freedom: "...if an underlying idea has an essential ambiguity, a precise formulation of that idea must try to *capture* that ambiguity rather than hide or eliminate it" (Sen, 1993, pp. 33-34). This is a methodological point, and it follows that the fact that there are corresponding ambiguities in my interpretation and propositions for an implementation of the Capabilities Approach, can actually be seen in accordance with my choice of hermeneutical research approach.

Concerning my starting points and presumptions, there is a need for naming a few that might have acted an impact on my reading of the capabilities theory. I am proposing operationalization of the Capabilities Approach with a 'hypothesis' that it might be beneficial for basic education and vice versa. Therefore, I naturally had a presumption that the approach is worthwhile, morally acceptable and perhaps possible to implement in education, since I wanted to develop an idea how it could be 'realized'. It seemed to me that a good way to approach this challenge hermeneutically, was to familiarize myself with the capabilities theory and the relevant concepts around it. After this, the reading and re-reading of the relevant research literature (most of all Nussbaum's capabilities writings), and educational research (mainly global education reports, Nel Noddings, and Human Rights Education material) made it possible for the cyclical character of interpretation to commence, as I



frequently returned to the list of Ten Central Human Capabilities and the initial writings of Nussbaum and Sen. Furthermore, I attempted to make the interpretative nature of the methodology visible in the structure of the thesis. As the capabilities literature is the primary data in this thesis, I have included rather long quotations from the original texts in my text. I propose that these quotations increase the trustworthiness and the believability of my work, as the reader can compare my interpretation and the text of the original source.

In the beginning of this sort of a theoretical inquiry based research process, there is a very actual danger of drowning under the confusing conceptual load. Instead of doing this, it was important to, at times, observe the theory from a more general perspective, from a distance, and view the theory as a bigger paradigm that does not exist in a philosophical vacuum. My conclusion is that the Capabilities Approach should be seen as an ethical-socio-political value based model, somewhat similarly to Human Rights. It was also challenging, yet extremely interesting, to familiarize myself with the foundations behind Nussbaum's theory and compare it to Human Rights and other theories of well-being. It is unfortunate that it was not possible within the limitations of this thesis to go in depth in the moral justifications of the approach. There are some ethically debatable issues and difficulties in the Capabilities Approach that I recognized and attempted to address, as there are some promising possibilities in its operationalization in the context of education.

One consideration that I still want to bring forward is my regarding of the standardized measurements of the Capabilities Approach. Throughout this process of inquiry, I have experienced uneasiness and contradictory feelings with certain issues Nussbaum has referred to. For instance, she writes that Human Development Index is "urging all nations to consider educational achievement as one of the most central elements of their national success" (Nussbaum, 2011. pp. 154-155). This is something that I as a researcher and an educator have a problem with. Even in my educational implementation discussion, I promote the pedagogy of care that is famously against standardized testing, comparing, quantitative studies in education etc. Intuitively and initially, I do not believe in objective measuring of well-being any more than I believe in standardized testing in schools.

Nevertheless, throughout this thesis I have been forced to mention some of the indexes, as Nussbaum and Sen have conducted a great deal of their research in the context of these indexes. Talking about these metrics such as GDP, GNH and Human development Index, and mentioning something about the way they operate has been necessary and unavoidable

in this thesis. I am not suggesting that it is utterly not recommendable to try to measure people's well-being, happiness or capability enhancement quantitatively in societies or even in schools. I admit that this might well be one further possibility for further research (even though I would propose extensive assessment and discussion whether, and if yes, how well-being can ever be measured). However, I myself have been more interested and concerned with the more profound, philosophical idea and construction of the Capabilities Approach as an educational (and societal) philosophy.

While thinking of the trustworthiness and completeness of this thesis, I started to ponder on the finality and the conclusiveness of Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach. There has been some disagreements whether Nussbaum's list is actually open to suggestions or not. I myself think, in a hermeneutical spirit, that no theory – for instance the considerations of this thesis on Nussbaum's list of Central Human Capabilities – is ever finished. It is exactly the way Aristotle comments on his own work at the end of his discussion of human nature, which is also cited by Nussbaum herself:

*“So much for our outline sketch for the good. For it looks as if we have to draw an outline first, and fill it later. It would seem to be open to anyone to take things further and articulate the good parts of the sketch. And time is a good discoverer or ally in such things. That's how the sciences have progressed as well: it is open to anyone to supply what is lacking.”*

(Aristotle as cited by Nussbaum, 1993. p. 267)

## 6 Concluding Remarks

In this thesis two main questions were raised: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Capabilities Approach as a theory of well-being? and What is basic education's institutional potential and significance in the operationalization of the Capabilities Approach? I began this study by introducing and describing the research methodology I had chosen to utilize in this thesis, and in the context of a theoretical inquiry, hermeneutics was found the most suitable methodology. The reasons behind this optimal choice, as well as some of the history of this methodological approach were explained. Then, the Capabilities Approach, its history, main developers, key concepts, philosophical influences, value-base, and its relation to other theories of well-being were examined. Here, the first research question was addressed, as the understanding of the Capabilities Approach as a well-being theory was construed and articulated.

The next step of this study concerned itself with the second research question. Having familiarized myself with the research literature, it started to dawn on me how vast this field of capabilities theory was, and how wide the concepts of well-being, happiness and human functionings are. It was necessary for me not to keep expanding my circle philosophically, but to narrow down and for a while solely concentrate on the operationalization of the Capabilities Approach in a specific context. Basic education became my context for the reasons I discussed in Chapter 4. I defined basic education as an institution and described different ways in which the Capabilities Approach could be significant for basic education. I am convinced that the Capabilities Approach's potential significance for basic education is remarkable and I wish that in the future it will be studied more. Basic education is an institution that has a role and potential in promoting and enabling human capabilities, well-being and equity. The Capabilities Approach is a relevant paradigm in multiple sectors of basic education; in school policies, on a classroom level, on curricular level and in the so-called physical school. Furthermore, there is a larger, socio-developmental sector, where basic education could be viewed as a powerful institution with opportunities towards social change. I also hold that unlike many institutions, education can be seen as both as an external, enabling factor in developing of human capabilities, but also, in the micro level context of education, it has potential in the development of individual innate capabilities.

After construing my understanding of the capabilities theory, I discussed the relevant concepts I came across in my hermeneutical inquiry (human rights, GDP, GNH, equity, Pedagogy of Care) in relation to the Capabilities Approach. After the discussion between the two major concepts or phenomena of the thesis, the Capabilities Approach and basic education, I moved on to reflection and assessment. Even though I had come to a conclusion that basic education as an institution has strong potential and possibly a significant role in bringing the Capabilities Approach in to practice, and I had discussed these two phenomena together, I still wanted to go around in my hermeneutical circle and assess, evaluate and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the Capabilities Approach. This was conducted in Chapter 5, where I introduced the most salient criticism of the Capabilities Approach, but also dealt with the trustworthiness issues of my own thesis. After re-analyzing the approach and articulating the counter arguments and the defending arguments, I still hold that the Capabilities Approach is a strong, and a persuasive counter-theory of well-being, and that I see great potential in the operationalization of it, in terms of basic education. I, however, suggest that the key aspect of the implementation of this approach is shared responsibility and clearly defined roles of different institutions. Researching different options of operationalization might be a prospect for future research.

Conclusively, I want to comment on the multiple possibilities within the topic of this thesis. Had this been a more extensive piece of research such as a doctoral dissertation, I could have included Antonovsky's well-being theory, or I could have given more space for the GNH, or the distinction and relationship between the eastern and western research traditions. Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed and the liberation in the context of global social injustices is also one direction where this topic could have led. The Capabilities Approach could also be examined in the context of the Nordic welfare system, or in development education, or sustainable development and nature ethics.

The possibilities are endless, yet, as always, hand in hand come the challenges. I have been forced to challenge my presumptions, initial ideas and arguments frequently and repeatedly during this research process. Thus, I have come to realize that interpretations, and, indeed, the researcher's hermeneutical circle is never complete. While studying the theories of well-being and finding answers to my research questions, I faced new questions that are still left unanswered. However, it might be possible to address them in the future. All in all, I believe that I have accomplished in building a rather comprehensive interpretation of the Capabilities Approach and that I managed to address it the way Nussbaum might hope re-

searchers to address it. At this point of my hermeneutical cycle I shall refer to Nussbaum and conclude with this final remark:

*“The Capabilities Approach is offered as a contribution to national and international debate, not as a dogma that must be swallowed whole. It is laid out to be pondered, digested, compared with other approaches – and then, if it stands the argument, to be adopted and put into practice.”*

(Nussbaum, 2011. p. 187)

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