

Disability and Human Development*

By

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Abstract.

The issue of disability has been neglected in the literature on human development. The human development approach is nonetheless a suitable basis for examining issues relating to disability, because it does not simply see human beings as a means to higher levels of income growth and production. There have recently been a number of important contributions which use one view which endorses the notion of human development - the capability approach. Indeed that approach was originally motivated by concerns relating to disability. The capability approach has significant advantages in the contexts of justice as well as the evaluation of the quality of life in relation to disability. While it also has connections with the social model of disability, it avoids its weaknesses and recognises the importance of both individual diversity and social factors. Finally, the literature on capability and disability can inform the gathering of data and various approaches to measurement which might be used to monitor progress in relation to disability issues.

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0. Introduction.

The notion of human development has significantly altered and influenced the landscape of contemporary development thought. With its roots in the philosophical writings of Aristotle, Marx and Kant, the idea has led to a significant conceptual shift away from a focus on material progress in development thinking towards one on human beings, seen as ends in themselves and not merely as means. In the history of development economics, the human development approach emerged from a range of different strands – including the work of the basic needs school (Steeten et al, 1981) and Amartya Sen’s writings on development conceived as ‘capability expansion’ (Sen, 1984, 1988 and 1999). Importantly, it was championed by Mahbub ul Haq at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) who led work on the *Human Development Reports* in the early 1990s. Over time these reports increasingly accommodated a wide range of issues, such as gender and sustainability, to show the relevance of the idea of human development to a variety of issues, underlining the point that the idea of human development involves a *paradigm* shift in development work.

Recent work on disability and development has emerged somewhat independently of the contributions of the human development school. Writers in this literature have noted that there are clear links between work on human development and disability (Harriss-White, 1996 and Baylies, 2002) while at the same time observing that the human development literature has not gone far in championing the cause of the disabled in the way that it has championed gender justice. This is in spite of the fact that some of those working in the field of human development – including Sen and Martha Nussbaum –

have recently engaged seriously with disability issues, especially in the fast growing literature on the capability approach. The chief purpose of this paper is to make and explore a series of inter-connected claims. These claims are that: the human development approach provides a strong conceptual foundation for work on disability; recent works on capability and disability show that amongst the family of views which constitute the human development approach, the capability approach has significant strengths in addressing disability issues; work on human development can thus make a significant contribution to advancing justice for the disabled, and in particular there is scope for advocacy in the *Human Development Reports*, which might include the publication of more extensive data, and the development of new measures which might to some degree capture the situation of the disabled in various countries.

The paper is organised as follows: section 1 focuses on the relationship between disability and development; Sen and Nussbaum's works on disability are discussed in section 2; further conceptual issues about the relationship between capability and disability (notably the location of the capability approach in relation to the so-called 'individual' and 'social' models of disability) are discussed in section 3; some implications relating to data and various approaches to measurement are discussed in section 4; and section 5 concludes.

1. Development and Disability.

Both 'development' and 'disability' can be defined in a variety of ways. While conceptual issues relating to 'disability' and 'impairment' are discussed later in this paper, I start out with the following rough definitions: disability is a loss of ability or opportunity of some form which results from impairment. Impairment in turn involves

some form of failure of bodily or mental function. Definitions of ‘development’ have multiplied over the years, but in this paper I shall focus on ‘human development’. The idea of human development emerged from a concern that development economists had grown so concerned with the expansion of per capita income that they had forgotten the human beings whom such an expansion should benefit. It has its roots in the work of the basic needs school who argued for the priority of meeting basic human needs in developing countries and Sen’s writings which defined development as an expansion of ‘capability’ (Sen, 1988, 1990 and 1999). ‘Capability’ refers to what a person can be or do, the set of valued ‘beings’ and ‘doings’ or ‘functionings’ open to her and from which she can choose. Again the focus is on *people*. Indeed it is this focus, and an acceptance that people are the ends of development and not just the means to higher levels of per capita income which is the hallmark of the human development approach (Haq, 1995).

Since the human development approach is endorsed by a wide range of thinkers – including those who advocate the priority of basic needs and others who favour the capability approach – it is clear that there is no one unified ‘human development view’ but rather a family of views. Amongst this family of views two strands can be distinguished. One focuses narrowly of giving priority to meeting basic needs, and for that reason is not necessarily concerned with equality as a goal (Streeten et al, 1981). The other sees development in terms of improvement of the quality of human lives which is equitable or just (Qizilbash, 1996a and 1996b). I refer to these two views as the ‘narrow’ and ‘broad’ versions of the human development approach. In this paper, I shall take the second of these views to be the approach which most closely approximates the notion of

human development which is advanced in the UNDP's *Human Development Reports*, though the narrow approach still no doubt has its adherents.

Even on this rather limited description of some of the views which endorse the human development approach, it is clear that these views are attractive for anyone concerned with incorporating disability issues within a development framework. First and foremost, the human development approach does not see human beings as merely the means of expanding production. It would not thus merely value them in terms of their productive capacity. Nor would it value the social loss to society from impairments and disabilities exclusively in terms of the loss of income or output measured in monetary terms. Even though there are significant losses from impairment and disability which can be measured in terms of the value of losses of output, so that – as Barbara Harriss-White notes - even traditional cost-benefit analysis supports community-based rehabilitation schemes (Harriss-White, 1996, p. 26), a framework which focuses on monetary gains and losses alone seems to be inadequate. Because the human development approach treats people as ends in themselves, it can provide a basis for a concern for, and action to ameliorate, the well-being of people with impairments even in the absence of any monetary gain from rehabilitation.

The link between the human development approach and disability here is not accidental but goes to the very heart of how we think about development. Indeed, in her path-breaking paper on the political economy of disability in India, Harriss-White (1996) also struggles with how to *define* development. Having noted that 'disability is a relative term because cultures define differently their norms of being and doing', she goes on to say that '[d]evelopment can be seen as a liberation from such social disabilities and from

the systems of technology, reason and value producing them' (Harriss-White, 1996, p. 3). It is hard here to fail to see that if development is seen as an expansion of capability, a liberation from disability can be seen to *constitute* development irrespective of any further effect on output and indeed any cost-benefit calculation. Thus, it is natural to use some version of the capability approach to address disability. However, Harriss-White's attempt to conceptualise development in the context of disability also provides a case for the human development approach more broadly. Harriss-White sees standard assumptions made in economic evaluation to be part of a 'technocratized policy discourse [which] is actually the product of a set of values expressing a polity where economic productivity, measurable or imputable in monetary terms, is positioned in first place as a criterion for allocation' (Harriss-White, 1996, p. 14). One must conclude that – on Harriss-White's account - standard approaches to economic evaluation form part of the 'systems of technology, reason and value' which produce 'social disabilities'. The human development approach may – as I have suggested - in fact better address issues relating to impairment and disability because the notion of human development does not position economic productivity in 'first place as a criterion for allocation'. Beginning from an account of human development thus appears to have a great deal to offer.

While the arguments just made suggest that the human development approach has a great deal to offer, and suggest in particular that the capability approach may prove to be insightful in the context of disability, the distinction between narrow and broad views within the human development approach has not been used in making central claims in favour of the human development approach. However, if one takes a broad view of human development which incorporates a concern for justice, clearly the human

development approach has more to offer as regards some standard concerns relating to disability. Indeed, both rights and participation have been central to advocacy relating to disability, and the human development literature has extensively engaged with each of these (UNDP, 1993 and 2000; Nussbaum, 2000; and Sen, 2006 *inter alia*). Ironically, it is precisely because some previous *Human Development Reports* do engage with these ideas that Carolyn Baylies (2002, p. 731-2) articulates a certain disappointment that the issue of disability has not received more attention in previous *Reports* – for example in the 2000 *Human Development Report* which is centrally concerned with rights.¹ Baylies also articulates a concern about one specific version of the capability approach – Martha Nussbaum’s – which involves a specific list of capabilities. Baylies writes that: ‘[i]f it is, indeed, the case, as she seems to suggest, that each of the items on her list of functionings and capabilities is deemed essential to the living of a human life or a good human life, this framework could be read as leaving people with impairments as not human at all’ (Baylies, 2002, p. 733). The fear then is that if some human functions are seen as necessary for human life – or a good human life – on the capability approach, this approach will exacerbate what Baylies sees as an already dangerous tendency which involves seeing disabled people as not entirely human. This version of the capability approach would then marginalise the disabled. To consider this issue, I now discuss the capability approach in more detail.

2. *Capability and Disability I: Sen and Nussbaum.*

There are now a number of versions of the capability approach and I begin with Amartya Sen’s. As we have seen, the approach conceives of development as capability expansion. It also sees poverty as ‘basic capability failure’ – that is, a failure to achieve

certain crucially important functionings upto certain minimally adequate levels (Sen, 1993, pp. 40-41). Finally, egalitarian justice is conceived in terms of 'equality of capability' (Sen, 1992). Sen's arguments for the relevance of capability as a 'space' for evaluating individual advantage and justice has often invoked examples involving the disabled from his earliest writings on capability, going back to his lecture on 'Equality of What?'. In that lecture and in his subsequent writings Sen has argued that certain influential positions in moral philosophy - including utilitarianism and Rawls' theory of justice - do not adequately take account of human diversity. In the case of utilitarianism, the goal is, typically, to maximize the sum or average of 'utility' (whether this is understood in terms of desire satisfaction, pleasure or happiness). Sen argues that focussing on utility alone can be misleading. His original discussion of this issue in 'Equality of What?' is concerned with egalitarian justice where, on Sen's reading, utilitarianism implies equality of *marginal* utility (i.e. the extra utility from an additional unit of some commodity or of income). He convincingly argues that in the case of a 'cripple' who is not as good at converting income into utility (at the margin) as a 'pleasure wizard', utilitarianism would give more income to the pleasure wizard. Furthermore, it may also be the case the cripple has no disadvantage in relation to the able-bodied in terms of his level of his *total* utility. Sen writes that the cripple may be quite well off in terms of utility because:

he has a jolly disposition. Or because he has a low aspiration level and his heart leaps whenever he sees a rainbow in the sky. Or because he is religious and believes that he will be rewarded in the after-life, or cheerfully accepts what he takes to be just penalty for misdeeds in a past incarnation. (Sen, 1982, p. 366).

This argument excapsulates one of Sen's fundamental worries about utilitarianism because it potentially undermines the very idea that utility is invariably a sensible basis for evaluating a person's well-being or quality of life (see also Sen, 1992, pp. 28-9). Sen's discussion also addresses Rawls' account of justice. In that account (Rawls, 1971, p.93) egalitarian claims are judged in terms of an index of 'primary goods', where these were originally conceived of as 'all purpose means' – goods one would desire whatever one's life plan. In later versions of his theory, Rawls (1993) conceives of these goods in terms of the needs of equal citizens, where citizens are equal in having two moral powers – which are the capacities to form and pursue a conception of the good and to have a conception of justice.² He also provides a list of primary goods, which include: income and wealth; the social bases of self-respect; powers and prerogatives of offices and positions of responsibility in the political and economic institutions of the basic structure of society; freedom of movement and free choice of occupation against a background of diverse opportunities; and basic rights and liberties (also given by a list) (Rawls, 1993, p. 181). Sen's basic claim in relation to this view is that a primary goods index will be insensitive to the differential rates at which people convert such goods into the objects they ultimately value. A disabled person may, for example, need more in terms of some primary goods than an able-bodied person to be able to do certain basic things (such as move around). Primary goods are explicitly conceived of as means in Rawls' theory, not just as ends, and if it is what one is actually able to do with these goods which is fundamental, then evaluating individual advantage in terms of primary goods is likely to be inadequate when it comes to judging egalitarian claims. Sen argues that Rawls' account is for this reason no better than utilitarian accounts when it comes to evaluating

the claims of the disabled (Sen, 1982, pp. 366-7; and 1992, pp. 28-9 and 79-84). It is the failure of these various accounts to address the case of the disabled and, more generally to allow for human diversity, which led Sen to advance the notion 'basic capabilities equality' in 'Equality of What?' and subsequently to espouse 'capability equality'. So the motivation for pursuing the idea of capability relates to concerns about disability from the very outset. In the subsequent literature (e.g. Cohen, 1993, p. 63) this is taken to be a significant strength of the capability approach over rival views of justice.

It is worth noting, nonetheless, that Sen's example of the cripple who might have a high level of utility may not be especially attractive to the disabled themselves. David Wasserman makes this point. He suggests that the challenge that disability poses for theories of justice has recently been framed in a way that is congenial to disability scholars and activists in part *because* it no longer invokes 'the fictional "happy cripple," Tiny Tim, resolutely euphoric in his impairment, illness and poverty' (Wasserman, 2005, p. 215). Inevitably Wasserman goes on to note that one of the reasons why the capability approach might not be congenial to people with disabilities is that 'Sen invokes Tiny Tim's euphoria in arguing that subjective welfare provides an inappropriate metric for equality and an inadequate conception of well-being, thereby treating the contentment of a crippled child as presumptively suspect' (Wasserman, 2005, p. 220). Sen's argument about the ability of the disabled to find contentment in the face of disadvantage is, nonetheless, part of a broader strategy which raises worries about 'utility' based views. The suggestion is that if people adapt to unfavourable circumstances and learn to be happy or restrict their desires in these circumstances, then the 'utility' calculus may underestimate their disadvantage. He has now made this argument in a range of contexts

including long terms unemployment and gender injustice (Sen, 2006, Qizilbash, 2006a and 2006b *inter alia*). Furthermore, the argument seems to be supported by psychological studies about adaptation, which suggest that the disabled often do adjust to their misfortunes (see Frederick and Lowenstein, 1996, p. 312). So even if Sen's discussion of the 'happy cripple' is not attractively formulated, its significance cannot be underestimated.

Given the central importance of disability in Sen's case in favour of capability as a space of evaluation, it is remarkable that the issue of disability has not been more salient in the human development literature. However, Sen's argument has been explored in various ways in both philosophy and economics. In economics, a number of recent studies have pursued his claims regarding the difficulties that the disabled encounter when it comes to converting income into functionings. As Sen (2004, p. 3 and 1999, p. 88) has himself noted the disabled are handicapped vis-à-vis the able-bodied in terms of earnings - what he calls the 'earnings handicap' - but also in terms of the ability to convert 'money into good living' which he refers to as the 'conversion handicap'. Recent empirical studies (notably by Burchardt and Zaidi, 2005 and Kuklys, 2005) have focussed on the 'conversion handicap' and shown that a failure to allow for it seriously underestimates the extent of poverty amongst households with disabled members when poverty is measured in income terms. These studies are examples of – what Sen (1999, p. 83) terms – the 'indirect approach' to applying the capability approach, in as much as they focus on income rather than capability itself, but adjust income measures to reflect the different rates at which people convert income into functionings. There are few if any studies which 'directly' apply the capability approach by looking looking at capabilities

and functionings rather than income. The UNDP's measures of human development, poverty and gender empowerment have used a more direct approach which does not merely look at income but also at direct measures of the quality of life. In this spirit some *Human Development Reports* provide data on the 'proportion of the population with disabilities' (see UNDP, 1997, pp. 176-7). There is, nonetheless, certainly a case for future *Human Development Reports* providing more comprehensive information on disabilities and impairments and also for further data collection. I pursue this point in section 4.

The philosophical literature has explored issues relating to capability and disability in greater depth than the economics literature. Martha Nussbaum's recent work on justice, which develops her own version of the capability approach, has taken Sen's arguments further in various ways. However, it is Nussbaum's earlier work which has been most controversial and led to the worry that the capability approach - or at least her version of it - may not treat the disabled as altogether human. Nussbaum's earlier writings on capability were informed by, and in some ways constituted, a reading of Aristotle's writings on justice, flourishing and human nature, and are, in that sense, 'neo-Aristotelian'. On her reading of Aristotle's account of human nature, the exercise of certain functions is characteristic of humanity. The relevant functions are clearly related to Aristotle's view of human beings as rational, political animals. The upshot of this view is that if, for example, an impairment sufficiently compromises someone's mental functioning, the relevant being would no longer be classed as a human being. The argument is not supposed to exclude mere irrationality, but 'people who live without planning and organizing their lives' (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 117). Individuals whose form of

life would be so far from the norm as no longer to classify as human might include ‘the survivor of a frontal lobotomy’ and ‘people who suffer from some severe form of mental retardation’ (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 117).³

This view is echoed in Nussbaum’s writings on her version of the capability approach – the ‘capabilities approach’ - at least up to *Women and Human Development*. In many of these writings Nussbaum has articulated a detailed list of capabilities, grouped under ten headings: life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play; and control over one’s environment (political and material). She suggests that there are two thresholds relevant to the realisation of the relevant capabilities. In relation to the lower of these thresholds she writes that ‘we may judge that the absence of capability for a central function is so acute that the person is not really a human being at all, or any longer – as in the case of certain very extreme forms of mental disability, or senile dementia’ (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 73). It is unsurprising that this view has caused some, like Baylies, to worry that the capabilities approach – and indeed work on human development – may not be a fruitful approach to take to disability. Certainly people with some serious mental disabilities would not be treated as human at all.

In her more recent discussion of disability in *Frontiers of Justice*, Nussbaum (2006) revises and develops her view. A great deal of her discussion of disability in this book is focussed on contrasting social contract theories – exemplified by John Rawls’ theory of justice - with her capabilities approach. Nussbaum generalises and develops Sen’s critique of Rawls. In doing so she focuses on difficulties in Rawls’ treatment of the issue of disability. In Rawls’ account: the principles of justice are agreed behind a veil of

ignorance; the principles apply to the ‘basic structure of society’ (its major institutions etc.); and they relate to the distribution of the benefits of co-operation amongst citizens, who have the two ‘moral powers’. The difficulty arises with regard to those people who fall short of these powers. The principles of justice are not selected by (or for) such people and relevant issues about disabilities are put off to a later ‘legislative stage’. To this degree, the issue of disability is marginalised in Rawls’ theory. Nussbaum’s major complaint is that this would mean that many disabled people would not qualify as citizens and their concerns would not be addressed in principles of justice which govern major social institutions. Nussbaum focuses on the lives of three disabled individuals: Sessa Kittay, who suffers from congenital cerebral palsy and severe mental retardation; her own nephew Arthur, who suffers from Asperger’s syndrome and Tourette’s syndrome; and Jamie Beroubé who was born with Downs syndrome. In a marked break from her earlier writings, Nussbaum sees all three as citizens whom any principles of justice must address. Echoing the central concerns of the literature on human development, Nussbaum finds fault with the idea – which she thinks underlies social contract views - that only *productive* members of society can be genuine citizens to whom the principles of justice apply (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 128). Sessa, Arthur and Jamie would certainly not – she thinks – be included as citizens on the basis that they are productive in augmenting social well-being. She notes (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 113) nonetheless that people with impairments are often unproductive, only because of the way in which society is organised. Here her writings echo the so-called ‘social model of disability’ which I turn to in the next section. Her capabilities approach sees people seen as ends in themselves. The notion of *dignity* is central to her approach. Nussbaum claims that ‘we do not have

to win the respect of others by being productive. We have a claim to support in the dignity of our human need itself' (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 160).

This more recent version of the capabilities approach is informed by the experiences of disabled people and differs from Nussbaum's earlier writings at a number of levels. However, Nussbaum still classifies some people with sufficiently severe impairments as non-human. The chief difference between her earlier and later views relates to how serious the impairment has to be for a person to qualify as non-human. So she writes that:

we can say of some conditions of being, say a permanent vegetative state of a (former) human being, that this just is not a human life, in any meaningful way, because possibilities of thought, perception, attachment, and so on are irrevocably cut off. (Notice that we do not say this if just one or more of a group of modalities is cut off: we say this only if the entirety of a group of them is cut off. Thus there is a close relation between this threshold and the medical definition of death. And we would not say this if any random one of the capabilities is cut off: it would have to be a group of them, sufficiently significant to constitute the death of anything like a characteristic human life. The person in a persistent vegetative condition and the anencephalic child would be examples). (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 181)

Nussbaum (2006, p. 432) concedes that this constitutes a significant modification of her earlier view which, she says, 'might have been read to suggest that if any one of the capabilities is totally cut off, the life is no longer a human life'.

This reading of Nussbaum's work shows that her most recent version of the capabilities approach is not as controversial as her earlier writings. It does not suggest that the human development approach – which is strongly echoed in her more recent writings with the focus on human beings as ends in themselves and not worthy of respect only on grounds of productivity – must dehumanise people with impairments, even very serious impairments. However, more importantly, it is clear that Sen and Nussbaum's discussions of this topic operate at different levels of ambition. Nussbaum's goal is to develop the capability approach as a (partial) theory of justice which might provide an alternative to social contract views. Sen's work falls well short of attempting to develop such a theory. His conceptual framework is nonetheless motivated by concerns relating to the quality of life of the disabled and arguably addresses issues relating to disability more adequately than utilitarian and Rawlsian views. In fact, most of the claims made in favour of the capability approach in the context of disability relevant to this paper are advanced in Sen's version of the approach and do not involve endorsing any view about what it is to be human.

3. Capability and Disability II: Individual and Social Models

While Sen and Nussbaum's writings on disability have made a significant contribution to the literature on social justice and the evaluation of the quality of life, their work has not seriously engaged with *definitions* of impairment and capability. However, recent work by Tania Burchardt and Lorella Terzi has attempted to locate the capability approach in relation to the most influential conceptual models of disability – the so-called 'individual' and 'social' models. One might guess that the underlying concepts advanced in the capability approach – functioning and capability – can indeed be used to mark the

distinction between impairment and disability, with the first relating primarily to limitations in functioning and the latter relating to a failure of capability. This hunch is borne out by the recent literature, though – as we shall see - there are significant differences in the ways in which Burchardt and Terzi locate the capability approach in relation to ‘individual’ and ‘social’ models.

The ‘individual model’ sees impairment as the chief cause of disability, and the disadvantage which arises from disability is, for this reason, seen as a matter for the individual rather than society. Because limitations in functioning and participation are seen as part of a medical condition, the emphasis tends to be on rehabilitation. This model informs standard definitions of disability. For example, the International Classification of Impairment, Disability and Handicaps proposed by the World Health Organization (WHO) uses the following distinction between the concepts of impairment, disability and handicap: an impairment is ‘an abnormality in the structure of the functioning of the body whether through disease or trauma; disability as referred to the restriction in the ability to perform tasks..., and handicap as referred to the social disadvantage that could be associated with impairment and/or disability’ (Terzi, 2004, p. 142). It is worth noting that Nussbaum (2006, pp. 423-4) defines terms along roughly these lines in *Frontiers of Justice*, though she qualifies her delineation of these terms by noting that ‘the line between impairment and disability is difficult to draw, particularly when the social context is not held fixed and is up for debate.’ So her most recent discussion uses terms which are influenced by the individual model.

The alternative to the individual model – initially outlined by Michael Oliver - is the ‘social model’ which sees disability as exclusively caused by social constraints.

According to this model, impairment involves ‘lacking a limb, or having a defective limb, organ or mechanism of the body’ and disability is ‘the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and hence excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities’ (Terzi, 2004, p. 143). While as we have seen, Nussbaum defines her terms along lines influenced by the individual model, Tania Burchardt’s chief goal in her paper on this subject is to suggest that there is significant common ground between the capability approach and the social model. On both, she suggests, a focus on income is inadequate, and will lead to an underestimate of the needs of the disabled (Burchardt, 2004, p. 740). Importantly, furthermore, just as the social model recognises the importance of social barriers, the capability approach notes the important role of social factors in influencing the transformation of resources or income into a good life. Burchardt also argues that the focus on freedom in the capability approach is a distinctive feature of the approach which is shared by the social model. In particular, the social model rejects the notion of ‘normal’ functioning, and does not see liberation from disability in terms of ‘living a life in conformity to some pre-defined notion of normality’ (Burchardt, 2004, p. 742). Finally, as regards the question of identifying which abilities are important, the social model suggests that this is a matter for the disabled, rather than medical experts, to decide (Burchardt, 2004, p. 743). This, of course, might run contrary to Nussbaum’s capability approach which includes a list of capabilities. It may be more compatible with Sen’s recent writings which suggest that the articulation of such a list is a matter for public debate (Sen, 2005), though I expect that he would be less comfortable with the idea of excluding the able-bodied from such debate. Nussbaum has also

explicitly argued against the idea that there should be a separate list specifically for the disabled (Nussbaum, 2006, pp. 186-190). In short, this is not an issue on which different versions of the capability approach take a unified view. One might add, nonetheless, that – as Burchardt (2004, p. 744) notes - standard issues about adaptation are relevant to this point. If public debate is influenced by an unjust status quo, because people have adapted to their living conditions - then the list which results from such debate might reflect that status quo. This would nonetheless be the case *even if* the debate were restricted to disabled people. Finally, Burchardt (2004, p. 746) sees disability as a form of capability failure, and to this degree sees the capability approach as useful in *defining* disability.

While Burchardt makes a strong case for an overlap between the central concerns of the capability approach and the social model of disability, Lorella Terzi has taken a rather different view criticising the polarised opposition between the individual and social models in the disability literature while also suggesting that the capability approach offers a way of avoiding this opposition. Terzi's work on this subject begins with a critique of the social model (Terzi, 2004). The social model can certainly be criticised on the grounds that according to it all relevant limitations in one's ability to participate in society are caused by social organization. This view does not recognise any disability which might not be removed by some appropriate change in social arrangements. It offers a very strong contrast to the individual model which entirely locates the causes of disability in individual impairments. The correct approach must lie in between these extremes.

The capability approach has a number of advantages in this context. Firstly, it recognises the importance of social factors in converting resources into a good life, but at

the same time - in Sen's hands – emphasises the importance of human diversity.

Furthermore, while differences in personal characteristics are central to Sen's version of the approach, he does not use the notion of 'normal' functioning – and so does not emphasise the notion of 'abnormality' which is rejected by the social model in discussing disability (Terzi, 2005a, p. 452). Obviously, the fact that the capability approach uses the distinction between functioning and capability also helps to define the distinction between disability and impairment. On Terzi's account - which is influenced by the works of Allen Buchanan and John Perry - impairment relates to the loss of some aspect of functioning, while disability is an inability to perform some significant class of functionings that individuals in some reference group are on average and ordinarily able to do under favourable conditions (Terzi, 2005b, p. 214). On this account, impairment does not imply disability. Disability arises from the interplay between impairment and social conditions. Terzi makes a strong case for the view that a key strength of the capability approach is that it defines a middle ground between the individual and social models. This case is broadly faithful to both Sen's and Nussbaum's writings which show an awareness of both social influences and individual characteristics. For example, Nussbaum (as we have seen) stresses the influence of social arrangements on the productivity of the impaired while also recognising the importance of individualized treatments and programs (Nussbaum, 2006, 190). This and other strengths of the capability approach which are identified in the recent literature can inform work on human development, including the development of measures which might be used to highlight disability issues.⁴

4. Some Implications for Measurement and Data Collection.

Data on disability in developing countries is limited and not necessarily comparable across countries. What data there is suggests that it is a very significant problem which needs to be much more seriously addressed than it has been in development research and policy. It suggests that around three quarters of the impaired live in developing countries (DfID, 2000; Baylies, 2002, p. 726). It also suggests that the disabled form a significant percentage of the world's (income) poor (Harriss-White and Sridhar, 2006, p. 126). Yet use of one measure of the quality of life which incorporates disability – the so-called Disability Adjusted Life Year – which is sometimes used by the World Bank appears to discriminate against the disabled by implying that if one had the choice between saving the life of a disabled or an able bodied person one should save the able-bodied person (Sen, 1997, pp. 216-7). As we have already seen, most existing applications of the capability approach to the issue of disability – at least within economics - focus on income, and adjust income poverty to allow for the differential rates at which income is converted into a good life. If such measures were used at the international level, clearly the proportion of poor households that contain a disabled member would rise.

What contribution can work on human development make to data collection and measurement issues relating to disability? Obviously, there is a strong case for gathering more data – or at least advocating that such data needs to be collected. Such data would be suitable for inclusion in *Human Development Reports* and would form part of what Mahbub ul Haq (1995) referred to as the 'human balance sheet'. Data collection exercises would obviously need to keep the distinction between impairment and disability clearly in mind. As we have already seen, this distinction between impairment and disability

mirrors the distinction between functioning and capability. Since many impairments are preventable, and since impairment need not imply disability, information is needed on both impairments and disabilities. As noted earlier, some previous *Human Development Reports* have reported on the proportion of the population who are disabled. The definition used in these reports (e.g. UNDP, 1997, p. 235) is the WHO definition which respects the distinction between impairment and disability. Nonetheless, worries have been expressed along the lines that relevant data may not clearly distinguish between disability and impairment. As Baylies (2002, p. 726) hints, this might be one reason why sometimes richer countries appear to have a higher proportion of disabled people than poorer nations. Of course, higher rates of age-related impairment in richer countries may be driven by higher life expectancy. However, in these countries it is also less likely that impairments will necessarily translate into disabilities (Baylies, 2002, p. 727). Finally, no accounting of the human dimension of disability would be complete without some attention being given to the care which society gives to the disabled.

Much of the impact of recent work on human development, whether in the UNDP reports or in the wider literature, has been made by innovative measures such as the human development index, the human poverty index and the various gender-related indices which these reports have introduced. The question naturally arises: if appropriate comparable international data emerges, is there a case for developing new measures relating to disability? Since the recent applied economics literature adjusts income poverty measures to allow for what Sen terms the 'conversion handicap', there is a case for developing non-income measures relating to disability. The main success of measures which have emerged from work on human development is that they pick up the

misleading nature of income measures. Adjusting such measures is obviously a move in the right direction, but more direct measures would be desirable. The fact that UNDP reports sometimes contain information on the proportion of the population which is disabled in some reports is clearly helpful. However, there is scope for presenting much more detailed and disaggregated information.

There are at least four approaches to developing a measure which might highlight the issue of disability and at the same time help to monitor progress in relation to disability issues over time across countries. The first of these begins by conceiving of disability as a form of capability failure. The natural implication of this approach is that one would attempt to quantify the 'shortfall' in capability for a range of different impairments.⁵ The resulting index would be – at least in conceptual terms – similar to the UNDP's human poverty index and related indices of capability poverty (Majumdar and Subramanian, 2001 *inter alia*). Because the measure would capture the extent that impairments are disabling, it would be sensitive to changes in the society which lessen the disabling effect of social institutions. It would not be a measure of impairments. Such a measure would be very demanding as regards information since it would pick up the difference between capability and functioning failure. While this seems – at least conceptually – the most obvious approach to take, there is nonetheless still a value in developing measures which focus on impairments. If social change (at least as regards disability) is not likely to be rapid and, as seems undisputable, many impairments are preventable, then measures which pick up the incidence and severity of impairments would also be informative and less informationally demanding than a measure of capability failure. They would operate at the level of functioning rather than capability.

Even if one measure focussed on capability while the other looked at functioning, these measures would nonetheless both be *direct* measures of the quality of life in the tradition of human development work.

Another approach to measurement would look instead at the *access* that people with impairments have, including their access to buildings, public spaces, paid employment and so on. This more indirect approach would naturally focus selectively on access involving specific functionings. It would attempt to capture the extent of the conversion handicap directly without beginning from an income measure and adjusting it appropriately. This ‘access’ approach may be less demanding at the level of information than approaches which look at capability or functioning failure. A related approach more akin to that involved in the the UNDP’s gender empowerment measure would look at the extent to which people with impairments are able to participate in society at various levels. It would naturally include participation in the labour market, as well as other areas of social and political life. This ‘empowerment’ approach again may be easier to implement on informational grounds. Issues relating to the selection of functionings and capabilities and the weights given to the selected functionings in such measures may arise in all the approaches just outlined as they do in most measures relating to human development and the participation of people with impairments in relevant selection exercises would obviously be essential.

Finally, Burchardt has suggested one possibility which may prove attractive from the point of view of advocacy. The suggestion is inspired by Sen’s well-known measure of ‘missing women’ which dramatises the issue of gender injustice. The analogue measure would attempt to capture the number of ‘missing impaired’ in various contexts.

For example, one might – as Burchardt (2004, p. 746) suggests – consider the difference between the employment rates of those who are and are not impaired and infer the number of ‘missing people with impairments’. Any she notes, any such measure would be based on fairly strong assumptions – such as an assumption about the preferences of various people who are and are not impaired as regards paid employment. It would nonetheless provide a potentially dramatic measure of the disadvantages or exclusion that the disabled face. Such a measure need not be restricted to participation in the labour market and might be used in diverse contexts where the impaired are noticeable by their absence.

5. *Conclusions.*

The human development approach has a great to offer to the analysis and understanding of disability because it treats people as ends in themselves and does not see people as valuable only to the degree that they are productive (given the relevant social context). In the light of this, and the significance of the issue of disability and development, the reticence of recent *Human Development Reports* on disability issues is surprising. Recent work on capability and disability – by Sen, Nussbaum and others - suggests that amongst the different ways of pursuing human development work, the capability approach is particularly suitable in the context of disability. Aside from having advantages in relation to accounts of justice and the quality of life, the approach avoids the limitations of both the individual and social models of disability. Finally, an examination of measurement issues in the light of this discussion opens up various possible approaches to measurement and data collection issues. Numerous approaches can be used operating at the levels of capability and functionings, as well as access,

empowerment and exclusion. Some of these are more demanding at the level of information than others. Collecting and presenting data on disability while clearly recognising the distinction between impairment and disability and the related distinction between capability and functioning failures is a key challenge if these approaches are to be implemented.

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Notes

¹ It is worth noting that a more general disappointment has also been expressed with the lack of attention given to disability issues in development studies more broadly. On this see Harriss-White (1996) and Yeo and Moore (2003).

² Rawls' conception of primary goods was revised in the 1975 edition of his *A Theory of Justice* which was produced for German translation. See Rawls (1999, p. xiii).

³ Similar judgements are, she tells us, involved in ‘Aristotle’s treatment of “monstrous births” and in his policies concerning abortion and the exposure of severely handicapped children.’ (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 118).

⁴ While explaining the strengths of the capability approach in relation to issues relating to disability, I have not argued that the approach is superior to alternatives – such as the basic needs approach. It might be argued that a strength of Sen’s capability approach is that it treats people as agents not merely as recipients of aid or help (Sen, 1999, p. 19). This may be seen as an advantage of the capability approach over needs approaches. However, needs approaches do typically also emphasise participation and autonomy (Streeten, 1981 and Doyal and Gough, 1991). Furthermore, some (like Gasper and van Staveren, 2002) have argued that the Sen’s capability approach does not sufficiently take account of human interdependence and care. This would clearly count as a weakness of his version of the approach. This criticism cannot be levelled at Nussbaum’s writings (particularly, Nussbaum, 1996) which give considerable attention to care in relation to disability. However, evaluating the relative merits of the capability and needs views in relation to disability is beyond the scope of this paper. I merely note that there is considerable common ground between versions of the two approaches (see Qizilbash, 2001).

⁵ The fact that impairments are defined in different ways in different nations does pose a problem for both data collection and measurement. Nonetheless, there may be some impairments and disabilities about which there is fairly universal agreement and in presenting data across countries, it would be natural to focus on such impairments and disabilities
