

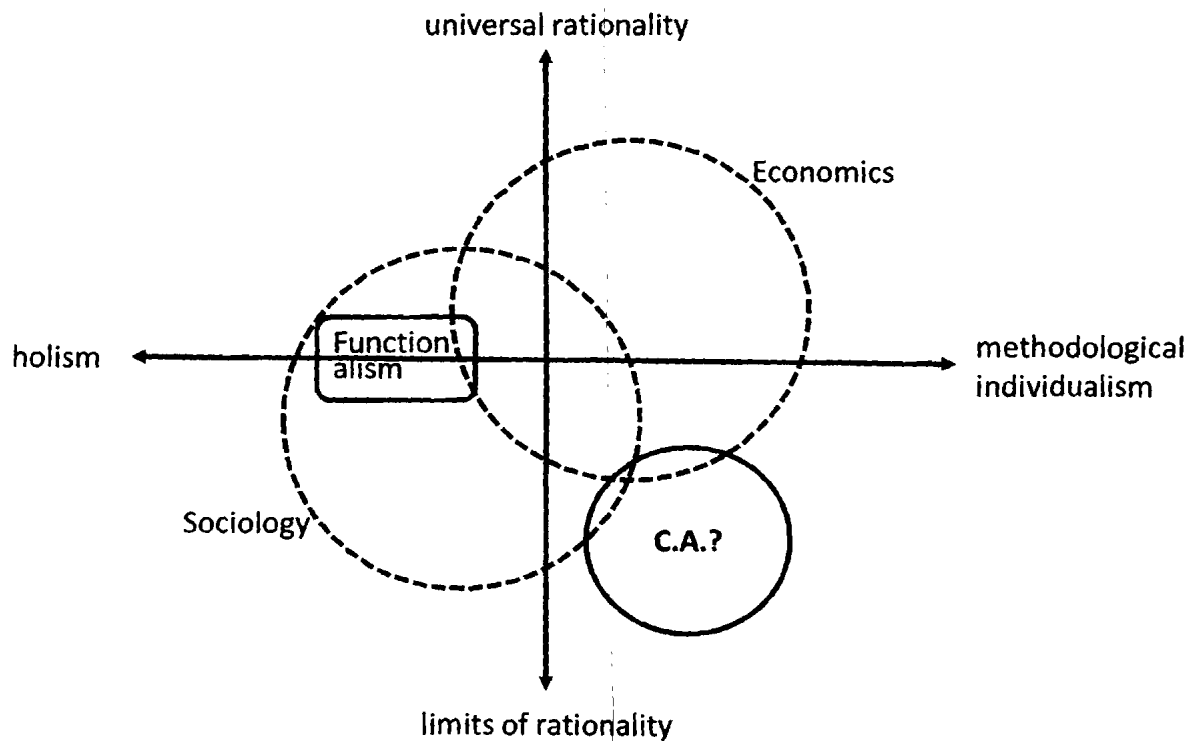
Is the Capability Approach an Alternative Framework in Sociology?
—The development of social indicators in Japan and human development indices—

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1. Positioning of Sociology and the Capability Approach

This paper will show that when comparing the Capability Approach to sociology it becomes apparent that the uniqueness of the Capability Approach is connected to individualism and the limits of rationality. If human development indices are built with an awareness of the uniqueness of the Capability Approach, they will continue to develop in the future. The Capability Approach is frequently positioned within the context of economics and philosophy, and is rarely associated with sociology which is positioned adjacent to economics. Compared to economics, sociology is connected to the limit of rationality and holism, while economics is connected to the universal rationality, and methodological individualism (fig.1).

Figure 1 Positioning of Economics, Sociology, and Capability Approach



As all sociologists are aware, three people of Max Weber, Emile Durkheim and Wilfredo Pareto are the very founders of sociology. Weber is of course known as a proponent of methodological individualism, on the other hand, he not only proposed instrumental action taking the optimum method based on utility, but also value rationality considering solely the achievement of the objective. He also proposed the behavior types of traditional action and affectional action. Durkheim focused on concepts such as solidarity, collective conscience, and anomie. He analyzed society from a collective perspective. Pareto, in addition to being a sociologist, was also a well-known economist, and believe economics involve logical action based on rationality, on the other hand, he insisted that sociology should deal with non-logical action based on sentiment. He also attempted a grand analysis of historical society using the theory of the circulation of the elite.

What are the implications of the assumption that 'the social world is rational'? It is the ranking of all elements comprising society, and ultimately, the positioning on a single axis from best to worst, in other words, a world view in which it is possible to rank all elements. Sociologists consider human behavior to be comprised of various patterns, and do not hold this world view. Sociologists believe that the concepts of solidarity and elite cannot be reduced to the characteristics of individual human beings. Thus, speaking in broad terms, the disposition of economics and sociology in the diagram is appropriate. If, we establish two axes, it can be seen that the Capability Approach is uniquely positioned. This approach adopts the methodological individualism to maintain the framework of decision-making theory in micro economics. On the other hand, it strongly opposes the view that the status of individuals and society is evaluated solely in terms of utility or economic value. In other words, the Capability Approach focuses on the 'limits of rationality'.

However, if we look more closely, economics incorporates macroeconomics and institutional economics, while sociology incorporates rational choice theory. Even if we consider sociology alone, and view the historical development in detail, the center of gravity of sociology can be seen to be wavering between these two axes. I will therefore draw the focus a little further and concentrate on Structural functionalism within the range of theoretical frameworks including sociology, introduce social indicators based on the influence of Structural functionalism, and draw comparisons with human development indices created based on the influence of the Capability Approach.

2. Functionalism in Sociology and Social indicators

Structural functionalism (also simply referred to as 'functionalism') was the mainstream of sociology until the 1970s. The term 'function' as used here should be considered to have a different meaning to that used with the Capability Approach. Functionalism is the offspring of the organic analogy (organic school of sociology). In terms of the human body, the function of the stomach is digestion, while the function of the lungs is respiration, and thus, a human being continues to exist. Functionalists believe that a number of functions must be accomplished for society to continue to exist. Functionalism developed in a unique manner in Japan, and the point of view that society will be destroyed or changed if a number of functions are not achieved was proposed. It is clear that functionalism is one variation of methodological holism. However, we cannot always say this if it is considering the limits of rationality— while multiple functions exist, they are, ultimately, evaluated from the single viewpoint of whether or not society can continue to exist.

Figure 2 the System of Social Indicators in Japan

Goal area	40/35	45/40	Fundamental social concern	40/35	45/40
A. Health	—	—	A-1. Improvement in level of health	101.1	115.0
			A-2. Improvement of social conditions for protection and promotion of health	115.0	102.7
B. Education, learning and culture	123.1 ¹⁾	118.9 ¹⁾	B-1. Fundamental education	118.0	115.7
			B-2. Upper secondary and higher education	108.4	115.9
			B-3. Self-developing activities	143.0	125.2
			B-4. Level of cultural environment	135.6	150.8
C. Employment and quality of working life	114.9 (126.0) ²⁾	122.7 (126.7) ²⁾	C-1. Growth of availability of advantageous employment opportunity	144.4 (144.3) ²⁾	103.3 (132.2) ²⁾
			C-2. Improvement in quality of working life	109.0 (108.7) ²⁾	120.6 (119.4) ²⁾
D. Leisure	126.3	143.6	D-1. Increase in level of freedom in life	103.0	106.7
			D-2. Improvement of life during free hours	149.6	180.5
E. Income and spending	124.1 (116.9) ²⁾	132.2 (119.8) ²⁾	E-1. Growth of income and assets	150.0 (128.4) ²⁾	186.3 (258.5) ²⁾
			E-2. Shrinkage of gap in income and assets	117.0	101.4
			E-3. Stabilization of income and assets	105.4	109.5
F. Material environment	95.3	110.1	F-1. Improvement of housing conditions	120.1	148.1
			F-2. Decrease of damages from harmful and disagreeable matters	68.1	74.2
			F-3. Decrease of damages from natural disasters	92.4	97.7
			F-4. Preservation of favorable natural environment	100.5	100.2
G. Crimes and execution of laws	98.3	110.6	G-f. Decrease of violence, sacrifice and suffering undergone by individuals	98.3	110.6
H. Family	108.3	107.0	H-1. Smoothing out of function in family life	111.7	116.9
			H-2. Stemming of trend toward disintegration of family	105.3	96.4
J. Classes and social mobility	118.9	112.5	J-1. Dissolution of inequality in classes	113.8	113.1
			J-2. Growing rate of social mobility	124.0	111.9

(Notes)

1) The figure indicates an average of the fundamental social concerns, B-1, 2 and 3.

2) The figures within parentheses are the simple average indices.

3) The synthesized index for the area of health is not calculated herewith, because A-1 and A-2 should not be integrated in nature.

(Research Committee, The Council of National Living 1974 *Social Indicator* p.29)

Shown in figure 2 is a system of social indices announced in 1979. The goal areas include health, education, employment, leisure, and crime. Health, for example, is divided into two fundamental sub-concerns—A-1 To Maintain Health and Longevity, and A-2 Implementation of the Social Conditions for Protection and Promotion of Health. Furthermore, as shown, A-1 is divided into sub-concerns A-1-a and A-1-b, and A-2 is divided into five sub-concerns. For example, the sub-sub-concerns within A-1-a include “Decrease in Danger of Death”, “Decrease in Quantity of Injury & Disease and Easing of its Seriousness”, and each is measured with individual indices such as “a Death Rate and Average Life Span Calculated-based theorem”, and “a Rate Injury & Disease and Function Loss from Injury & Disease Calculated-based theorem”. Similarly, A-2-a is measured with “Volume of Nutrition Intake”, “Per-capita Living Space in a House”, “Sewage System Diffusion Ratio”, and “Suicide Rate” etc. By gathering individual indices, it is possible to evaluate the health of Japanese society. Naturally, the geometric average and factor analysis etc. are employed in the synthesis of these individual indices. However, this is not a set method, and the pros and cons of synthesizing of indices have been discussed since the beginning. It is my intention to criticize the operation of synthesizing in this report.

In Japan, sociologists have been closely associated with the creation of these indices. The evidence can include a magazine article for the general public. The article was featured in three issues (“*Economist*” 1977 55(1)-(3)). The titles of those articles was “how do you measure a standard of welfare?”. A statistician, an economist, and three authoritative sociologists participated in the round table discussions. All sociologists were advocates of functionalism. To a functionalist, the goal areas of social indices corresponds to functions. Functionalists were ambitious in their synthesizing of these indices and believe that the extent to which objectives are achieved indicate to the maintenance and change of society.

At the time of publication social indices focused public interest, and continued to be created and used even beyond the 1970s, albeit for different measurements, with different concepts, and under different names. However, they no longer attract the same level of interest, and are not used by public administration. Such indices are no longer justified by social theories. Why has the importance of these social indices declined? The influence of changing times is no doubt a factor. As economic growth has slowed down, the public focus has shifted exclusively to economic growth. Another reason is that many people no longer accept that the prosperity of society can be measured by social indices. In practical terms, the work of synthesizing individual indices should be considered to have a problem. Naturally, this way of thinking reflects the functionalist’s awareness

that there was a 'rationality for the totality of society.' While criticizing the rational index of GNP, they also attempted to find an alternative rational indicator for society.

There is a newspaper article that an event to show that issue of the Social indicators figuratively was reported. The newspaper article (The Mainichi Newspapers May 14, 1998 evening) notes the anger of the governor of Saitama Prefecture on being ranked as the lowest of all prefectures for six consecutive years based on people's life indicators. A ranking of all prefectures was prepared using social indices. Saitama Prefecture is located to the north of Tokyo, with much of its population commuting to the center of Tokyo for school and work, and has a high growth rate. The provision of public facilities has, however, not kept up with population growth, and the governor disagrees strongly of being ranked as least prosperous. He said that if it is difficult to live here, no one will come. I do not consider the attitude of the governor to be unique. Rather, I consider it to be wrong to use social indices to rank prefectures.

3. Is the Capability Approach an Alternative Framework in Sociology?

I have introduced social indices, and noted their difficulties. When we consider the significance of the human development indices within this context, it can be, or at least should be considered as demonstrating the limits of rationality based on methodological individualism in accordance with the Capability Approach. However, this characteristic does not seem to be necessarily recognized. We can look over the human development indices noted in the Human Development Report of 2014. The report emphasizes synthesizing for each country. The Life Expectancy and Education indices are not those which can be reduced to an individual. This presents us with a perplexing impression because the human development indices incorporate the idea of the Capability Approach, and the Capability Approach is diametrically opposed to Structural functionalism. The question thus arises as to whether or not human development indices resemble a social index. My response is that the current human development indices are not necessarily based on the Capability Approach, and include distortions.

The human development indices were originally used to measure the abilities of individuals not able to be reduced to a single utility index. However, when actually measured and processed, the superiority of the human development indices are not always clearly apparent. For the future, the human development indices will develop and become more complex, however it is necessary to maintain their inherent characteristics. For example, is there a problem listing countries in alphabetic order? Or is it sufficient to list by region, from north to south? Is each index readily understandable

if we show figures for the bottom 25% of countries in red? We can feel prosperity or poverty, happiness or unhappiness through various individual concrete experiences. Thus, we agree with the capability approach that situations of human beings should not be evaluated by a single simple criterion such as utility, at least, from a normative perspective. I believe, similarly, that the ranking countries by synthesizing various individual indicators has no substantial meaning. To the contrary, this will lead to superficial public interest and will bring about the decay of the human development indicators in the future.

In this context, the Capability Approach is unique in that it maintains methodological individualism while emphasizing the limits of rationality. If compared to the mainstream of conventional sociology, it is certainly an alternative approach. In fact, the symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, and institutional theory approaches of the 1980s and later, brought diversity to sociology, and have generally shifted the focus towards the Capability Approach. When we consider this reality, the capability approach can be seen as a complementary or closely associated framework, rather than an alternative.

Your Questions and Comments by Email are Welcome! RXG00156@nifty.ne.jp

The content in this presentation is a part of the results of research during my sabbatical from Teikyo University.

Is the Capability Approach a Valid Alternative Framework in Sociology?

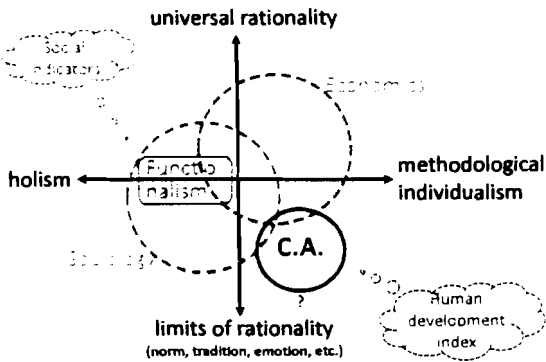
—The development of social indicators in Japan and human development indices—

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■ The Founders of Sociology

- M. Weber value rationality, traditional action, etc.
- E. Durkheim solidarity, collective conscience, anomie, etc.
- V. Preto non-logical action, the circulation of the elite, etc.

■ Positioning of sociology economics and the capability approach



■ Let's Take Functionalism, Social Indicators, and Human Development Indices for Examination in Detail.

...functionalism accounts for a social activity by referring to its consequences for the operation of some other social activity, institution, or society as a whole. ... (Dictionary of Sociology, Penguin Books 4th edition)

■ Systems of the Social Indicators (Japan, 1979)

Class name	49/50	45/46	Permanent social indicator	49/50	45/46
A. Education, income and culture	121.10	114.00	A-1. Improvement of level of health A-2. Improvement of level of health A-3. Improvement of level of health A-4. Improvement of level of health	118.0	111.7
B. Employment and quality of working life	114.0	112.7	B-1. Quality of employment of advanced B-2. Improvement of quality of working life B-3. Improvement of quality of working life	108.0	107.1
C. Leisure	126.1	147.0	C-1. Leisure in level of leisure in life C-2. Improvement of life quality free time	102.0	100.7
D. Income and spending	124.1	121.2	D-1. Growth of income and assets D-2. Shortage of pay in income and assets D-3. Shortage of pay in income and assets	100.0	100.4
E. Material environment	95.1	100.1	E-1. Improvement of housing conditions E-2. Decrease of dangerous State household E-3. Decrease of dangerous State household E-4. Decrease of dangerous State household	100.1	100.2
F. Crime and maintenance of law	98.1	100.0	F-1. Decrease of crime, accident and F-2. Decrease of crime, accident and F-3. Decrease of crime, accident and	98.1	100.0
G. Family	101.0	101.0	G-1. Improvement of condition in family G-2. Improvement of condition in family G-3. Improvement of condition in family	101.0	101.0
H. Change and social mobility	114.0	113.0	H-1. Change of social mobility H-2. Change of social mobility	113.0	113.0

■ Magazine article about the Social Indicator in 1977

Three of the five participants were sociologists (functionalists).

Symposium How do you measure the standards of welfare? (sequel) -considering the Social Indicators-

Can you make an index about welfare such as the GNP? Is the synthesis of indexes desirable?

■ Newspaper article about the Social Indicator in 1998

When "the richness index" was created by the Economic Planning Agency, criticisms occurred from the low ranking prefectural governors.

Above all, the governor of Saitama prefecture which was ranked last for six consecutive years complained severely.

This Week's "I Have an Objection"

Saitama Prefecture TSUCHIYA, Yoshihiko

"If it is difficult to live here, no one will come."

■ H. D. Indices (2015) Create Synthesis, Ranking. Is this appropriate?

■ When comparing the Capability Approach to Sociology, its Uniqueness is based on Individualism focusing on the limits of Rationality. If H. D. Indices are built with the Uniqueness of the C. A., They will also develop in the future. (In fact, Sociology has shifted its focus to the C. A. in recent years.)
