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Valuing nature: Māori philosophy and the capability approach

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ABSTRACT

Can the capability approach to well-being and development capture the way nature is valued within “Mātauranga Māori” (the philosophies of the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa/New Zealand)? This paper argues that current articulations of the capability approach, despite encouraging and requiring cross-cultural dialogue, are unable to include Māori values as they apply to nature. Māori values express a relationship with nature grounded in the physical and spiritual dimensions of “whakapapa” (genealogy). Such an approach differs markedly from that which values nature in light of human agency (as Amartya Sen’s theory does) or dignity (as Martha Nussbaum’s theory does). For the purposes of this paper, this difference highlights the need to create space for cross-cultural conversations which open up real opportunities for new ways forward. The capability approach helps to create the space needed for these conversations, but is unable to cover the ground required for their full expression. There is not enough breadth to guarantee a Māori voice within current articulations of the capability approach. There is a need for proponents of the capability approach to think beyond its limits in order to fully engage with those values yet to be fully considered within the capability framework.

KEYWORDS

Māori philosophy;
environmental ethics;
capability approach; Amartya
Sen; Martha Nussbaum

Introduction

According to the capability approach, well-being and development should be concerned with what people are able to do and be – that is, people’s capabilities to function (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009). Development theorists, policymakers and practitioners should pay attention to the kinds of lives people live, and to whether people are able to live the kinds of lives they value (Nussbaum, 2000, 2006; Sen, 1980, 1999, 2009). Such an approach acknowledges that a range of diversities (physical, emotional, cultural, social, economic and geographical) impact on what people are able to do and be (Robeyns, 2011). In particular, the approach recognises that culture is a constitutive part of well-being and a constructive factor in how life is valued (Nussbaum, 2000; Rao & Walton, 2004; Sen, 1999, 2004a, 2007; UNDP, 2004; White & Deneulin, 2009). As a result, proponents of the approach also recognise the importance of community engagement for the conceptualisation and implementation of well-being and development initiatives.

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The emphasis that the capability approach places on people's lives and freedoms resonates with Māori ideas about well-being and development (Barcham, 2012; Watene, 2013). Māori ideas about well-being and development themselves resonate with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, encapsulated by the principle that Māori (and all indigenous peoples) ought to "freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development" (Errico, 2007a, 2007b; UNPFII, 2007). Like the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the capability approach takes people's freedom (i.e. people's real opportunities to live lives they value) to be of central importance (Daes, 2008; Sen, 1999).

While there has been some discussion about the similarities between the capability approach and Māori ideas about development (Barcham, 2012; Watene, 2011, 2013), no in-depth engagement of philosophical foundations exists. To what extent can the capability approach truly capture Māori values as they apply to well-being and development? What insights can Māori values bring to development theory and practice, and to the capability approach to development theory and practice in particular? The aim of this paper is to initiate a cross-cultural conversation that contributes to answering these questions. The paper does this by examining and comparing the conceptual basis of the capability approach with Māori values, as they both apply to nature. Cross-cultural dialogue about our relationships with the natural world are important for more than mere academic reasons. As the global community moves to a Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda – and as local conversations over the ownership, use and management of land and natural resources increase – so, too, does the significance of cross-cultural engagement with this topic (Watene & Yap, 2015). Cross-cultural dialogue which is able to generate practical pathways forward requires engagement and understanding at philosophical levels. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate what this level of engagement might look like.

This paper begins by separating the two prominent articulations of the capability approach – Amartya Sen's agency-based approach, and Martha Nussbaum's dignity-based approach. This move acknowledges that there are two variants of the capability approach, and the paper demonstrates how the differences between them bear on how the natural world can be valued within the approach. The paper then provides an overview of how Māori philosophies typically place value in the natural world, with particular emphasis on the importance of the physical and spiritual dimensions of "whakapapa" (genealogy). The next section then brings Māori philosophies into conversation with the foundations of the capability approach and demonstrates the points at which Māori values and the capability approach converge or differ. The section revisits the capability approach in order to show why it is unable to fully comprehend Māori values as they apply to nature. The conclusion is that the differences highlight the need to create space for cross-cultural conversations which open up opportunities for new ways forward. The capability approach helps to create these conversations but is unable to cover the ground required for their full expression. There is a clear need for capability theorists to think beyond the limits of the approach in order to fully engage with those values yet to be considered within the capability framework.

It is important to make two points before proceeding. Firstly, as this paper focuses on Māori philosophical concepts, we need to point out that the finer details of Māori worldviews and narratives can differ between *iwi* and *hapū* (Māori tribal groups). "Mātauranga Māori" (Māori knowledge and philosophy) is a rich and varied body of knowledge which has (and continues to be) transformed as it is applied to Māori life in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It is important to note, therefore, that this article focuses on those core Māori concepts and values which tend to be shared by all *iwi* and *hapū* (Māori tribal groups) and which tend to form the foundational basis of Māori values. Secondly, it is important to acknowledge the growth of relational approaches to nature which have grown and continue to grow within western philosophical frameworks. This paper acknowledges the importance of these approaches and this work for bridging gaps between indigenous values and western development thinking (Chapin III, Kofinas, & Folke, 2009; Common & Stagl, 2005; Naess, 1989). The aim of this paper, however, is to bring Māori philosophical values into direct conversation with the capability approach, in order to undertake an important first step in the process of bringing these ideas together.

The capability approach: two capability theories

An approach to well-being and development which tells us to focus on capabilities is incomplete, since we need to know which capabilities matter. Amartya Sen is well known for his refusal to endorse a list of capabilities, while Martha Nussbaum is well known for developing one such list (Nussbaum, 2000, 2005, 2006; Sen, 2005a, 2005b). Their answers to the “list question” result from commitments and differences at the theoretical foundations (Crocker, 2008; Qizilbash, 2012). Alongside whether a list of capabilities is developed or not, these foundational differences shape how the theories can be applied and used, what challenges arise, and what problems can be resolved (Qizilbash, 2012; Watene, 2011). Most importantly for this paper, these differences determine how the natural world is included and valued, and the extent to which other ways of valuing the natural world can be taken on board.

On the issue of listing capabilities, Sen (2005a, 2005b) tells us that a list of capabilities, while consistent with the approach, is not required by it. A focus on capabilities marks a simple but significant move away from standard metrics, so the mere inclusion of the space of capabilities is already (even without a list) a major contribution (Qizilbash, 2012). The capability approach provides a new way of evaluating well-being and development – and rejects standard evaluation tools which dominate development thinking. Sen is in one obvious sense certainly right. The capability approach is (primarily) just that – an *approach* to well-being and development which can be utilised and furthered to develop specific capability theories. As a broad approach, it is (by definition) incomplete and pluralistic. It can be used across a range of disciplines and shaped to answer a range of questions. It is open to constant review – and it is able to acknowledge that a number of lists of capabilities can (and should) come out of the use of the approach in different contexts (Alkire, 2002; Qizilbash, 2012; Robeyns, 2005, 2006). Grounding the approach in a general list of capabilities could potentially undermine this all-purpose use.

This is not to say, however, that a capability theory requires (or arises only on the back of) a list of capabilities, since it is the foundation upon which a particular capability theory is built which determines whether a list of capabilities is appropriate. For instance, unique to Sen’s theory is the differentiation between four spaces of advantage: (1) well-being; (2) agency; (3) freedom; and (4) achievement. Achievement is concerned with what one manages to accomplish, and freedom with the real opportunity which one has to accomplish what one values. An agent is someone who is able to pursue and realise goals they have reason to value, and well-being consists of those things which are constitutive of one’s well-being (Alkire, 2002; Crocker, 2008; Qizilbash, 2012; Sen, 1984, 1999, 2009). This four-way distinction allows Sen to measure and compare advantage in at least four spaces: (1) well-being freedom; (2) well-being achievement; (3) agency freedom; and (4) agency achievement.

The significance of this distinction is at least twofold. Firstly, it provides Sen with a way of capturing how our actions and reasons for acting are affected by a number of different things, some of which do not add to (our own or someone else’s) well-being. Sometimes we act for reasons and in ways that are not directly related to well-being at all, but which are expressions of our agency. Indeed, when we refuse particular medical treatments or undertake hunger strikes for political purposes, we may be choosing to act in ways that diminish well-being (Alkire, 2002). Secondly, the importance of agency means that there is a limit to how far pure theory can take the approach. For Sen, a list of capabilities can only be drawn from democratic deliberation – drawing on the agency of each member of society (Crocker, 2008; Sen, 2005b, 2009). It is more important for Sen that we ask, “how and who is drawing up the list of capabilities?” rather than (or at least before), “what should go on it?”

The problem is not with listing important capabilities, but with insisting on one pre-determined list of capabilities, chosen by theorists without any general or public reasoning. To have such a fixed list, emanating entirely from pure theory, is to deny the possibility of fruitful public participation on what should be included and why. (Sen, 2005b, p. 335)

For Sen, agency is something that we have reason to value, and it is this commitment that underpins his continued refusal to formally endorse a list (Alkire, 2002; Crocker, 2008; Robeyns, 2005). It is this emphasis on, and importance of, agency that provides us with a way in which to characterise Sen’s

theory. Agency is given normative value within Sen's capability theory – and it provides us with a capability theory that is agency-based (Crocker, 2008).

In contrast, Nussbaum sets out an Aristotelian conception of dignity to ground and develop her capability theory. There are two inter-related ways in which dignity is expressed within the theory. The first expression is grounded in an innate dignity. Nussbaum tells us that “any child born into a species has the dignity relevant to that species” (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 347). The second expression is in the list of capabilities itself. Nussbaum (2006) claims that what we typically mean by dignity is being able to do and be certain things. In other words – and bringing both of these expressions together – Nussbaum thinks that our intuitive understanding (i.e. our considered judgements) about human dignity will lead us to the capabilities on her list, as well as to the conclusion that they “should be pursued for each and every person, treating each as an end and none as a mere tool of the ends of others” (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 70).

The list of capabilities, in other words, are constitutive of and flesh out this conception of human dignity: “Dignity is not a value independent of the capabilities, [and] the articulation of political principles involving capabilities are (partial) accounts of a life of human dignity” (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 7). Dignity is first expressed in an innate sense of respect (i.e. as being treated as an end), and then finds its expression in the kinds of beings we are – that is, capable of important activities. From here it is easy to see why Nussbaum's capability theory includes a list of capabilities. The approach is dignity-based, and dignity is expressed in terms of valuable capabilities. Unlike Sen, whose agency-based foundation rejects a general list of capabilities from the start, Nussbaum's dignity-based foundation requires it.

Nussbaum's account of dignity and Sen's account of agency lead to two very different capability theories. While the differences are often exemplified by whether a list of capabilities is appropriate or required, they have their origins in very different aims and foundations (Qizilbash, 2012; Robeyns, 2005; Watene, 2011). For the purposes of this paper, these differences impact on how the natural world is and can be valued, and determines whether other ways of valuing the natural world can be taken on board.

Valuing nature: agency and dignity

How we treat and think about the natural world is bound up with the value that we place on it. A widely held view is that the natural world ought to be valued primarily (if not solely) in terms of the contribution it makes to the well-being of current and future people (Anand & Sen, 1994, 2000; World Commission on Environment & Development [WCED], 1987). In such a view, the natural world is a valuable aspect of a broader programme of sustainable people-centred development. The value of the natural world depends on how we interpret well-being. The capability approach tells us that this means we ought to preserve and, where possible, expand “the substantive freedoms and capabilities of people today without compromising the capabilities of future generations to have similar or more freedom” (Sen, 2009, pp. 251–252). Present generations ought to leave behind a “generalised capacity to create well-being”, rather than “any particular thing or any particular resource” (Anand & Sen, 2000, p. 2035). The natural world is valuable, in other words, when it contributes to (and helps us to balance) the substantive freedoms of current and future people. The expansion of capabilities is, in this view, intimately bound up with the natural world.

Sen's agency-based theory is straightforwardly committed to the view that the natural world is valuable because of the contribution it makes to well-being and agency. What is important is the relationship that the natural world has (and so the contribution it can make) to the well-being and agency of individuals. In such a view, the natural world is acknowledged as bearing significantly on the external conditions in which well-being and agency are achieved and expressed. The natural world plays, in other words, an important role in determining and influencing how important aspects of well-being are understood, pursued, and realised. The natural world – such as climate, proneness to earthquakes, rising sea levels, and water quality – impact on what people require (and are able to source) in securing capabilities for nourishment and housing.

This seems straightforward enough, except that Sen's four-way distinction means that we can say a bit more than this. The importance of agency provides us with a deeper sense of what an agency-based capability theory is able to say about the natural world. We may, after all, value the natural world for reasons that have no direct benefit for anyone. We may, to use Sen's example, support the continued survival of the spotted owl even when we are never likely to see a spotted owl, or benefit in any way from its continued existence (Sen, 2004b). Agency need not, in other words, transpire in a concern for our own (or anyone else's) well-being or agency. Certainly, the natural world may bear on how that agency is expressed, but the important point is that it may not.

So, we have two ways in which the natural world is valuable. The natural world is valuable – in a general sense – because it contributes to the well-being and agency of people. However, the natural world is also valuable *when* this value is an expression of agency. In this case, the spotted owl (for instance) might be valuable for its own sake – in virtue of the value of human agency. This is where the real bite of Sen's agency-based capability theory can be seen. The value placed on agency and so the treatment of freedom as a place-holder (the fact that there is no list of capabilities) leaves scope for the inclusion of diverse reasons and values. It leaves room for a number of ways in which the natural world might be valued. Determining what these freedoms and values are or ought to be simply requires that we engage with the values that exist. The value placed on agency encourages and requires us to enter into cross-cultural and participatory dialogue.

Nussbaum's dignity-based theory is expressed as both innate dignity and the list of capabilities. Nussbaum's starting point is wider than Sen's – this is demonstrated in the way that the list of capabilities directly recognises the importance of our freedom to have concern for "other species" (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 80, footnote 85; 2006, p. 77). Being able to live with concern for and in relation to the natural world is acknowledged as something we ought to value (whether or not we pursue this functioning ourselves). More than this, Nussbaum includes a range of species directly. The list, and starting point of dignity, speaks to any creature which "has either the capacity for pleasure and pain, or the capacity for movement from place to place, or the capacity for emotion and affiliation, or the capacity for reasoning and so forth (we might add play, tool use and others)" (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 362).

In other words, the starting point of dignity and the list of capabilities is not reserved for people alone – and is able to extend the scope of concern directly since "other species" have their own form of dignity. The value of the natural world is strengthened by this move. Nussbaum gives us more than human-centred reasons to place value in the natural world. The natural world is valuable because of the contribution that it makes to the lives of people and non-human animals. More specifically, the natural world is valuable because it underpins the dignity of humans and non-humans. Nussbaum gives us more scope for understanding who the natural world benefits, and how these benefits contribute to the lives of human beings and non-human animals.

The value that Sen places on agency leaves open how the natural world is valued and treated. Sen allows for various ways in which to place value on the natural world, but the value of the natural world remains grounded in the value of human agency. Despite allowing for other ways of valuing the natural world (which are not agency-based), the intrinsic value of the natural, for Sen, remains in virtue of the value of agency. Nussbaum grounds her approach in an Aristotelian conception of dignity, which makes her approach much broader than Sen's. Non-human animals are included within the theory in their own right – so the natural world is valuable for more than just the benefit of human beings. In both cases, however, the natural world is not valuable in its own right, but only valuable in light of the importance of either human agency or dignity. While Sen and Nussbaum agree that the natural world is valuable because it contributes to peoples' lives, they both also agree that people are able to improve and enhance the natural world. The benefits are and can be two-way (Nussbaum, 2006; Sen, 2009). In highlighting this mutually beneficial relationship, the natural world is treated as an active contributor to people's lives. The natural world is not, in this view, something which ought to be left alone but (more importantly) something which can (and ought to) be altered to impact favourably on our lives.

Valuing nature: Māori values

Well-being and development is, for many indigenous peoples, typically bound up with and inseparable from the natural world.

[...] indigenous peoples have special relationships with their land which they see as imbued with a spirituality and sacredness not generally comprehensible by others. The land for them is more than just a habitat or political boundary; it is the basis of their social organisation, economic system and cultural identification. (Nicholas & Singh, 1996, p. 1, quoted in Tunks, 2002, pp. 114–115)

The natural world tends to be an important aspect of indigenous worldviews (Daes, 2008). Mountains, rivers and lands tend to be markers of cultural identity and belonging. Relating to the natural world in these ways provides different connections to landscapes, and generates different rights and obligations for people and to places. Understanding the value arising within the natural world requires some sense of how it typically features within a particular indigenous worldview, and here we focus on Māori values.

Māori creation narratives provide an account of the relationships between all things, and extend back to the origins of the universe (Marsden, 2003a, 2003b; Marsden & Henare, 1992; Walker, 1992). The narratives place all things within a single creation framework – that is a single genealogy. In so doing, the narratives illustrate the central place that “whakapapa” (i.e. genealogy – literally, “to place in layers”) has within the Māori world (Marsden, 2003a, 2003b; Marsden & Henare, 1992; Mutu & McCully, 2003; Sadler, 2007). “Whakapapa” provides an account of the connections and relationships between people and all things – making sense of the world through relationships. All human beings, non-human animals, and the natural world have a common origin, history and future.

Explaining the value of the natural world in terms of “whakapapa” makes landscapes, seascapes, waterways, natural resources and other creatures “tupuna” (ancestors), “whānau” (kin), and imbued with “mana” (spiritual and physical authority and power) and “mauri” (a spiritual life essence) (Marsden, 2003a; Patterson, 1992, 2000; Sadler, 2007). As all creatures are ancestors and kin, they give rise to various kinds of “kaitiaki” (trustee) obligations – obligations to protect, enhance and conserve (Marsden, 2003b; Waitangi Tribunal Report, 2011). If the natural world is understood in this way – as having “mana” and “mauri” – then improper use of the natural world is wrong for both physical and spiritual reasons. Improper use undermines the “mana” (authority and power) of the various creatures and resources themselves, as well as the “mana” of the spiritual powers which created them (Kawharu, 2000). In addition, mistreating the natural world would be wrong because it would prevent the natural world from enhancing (“manaaki”) our lives, and fulfilling the kin-based obligations the natural world has to us (Patterson, 1992, 2000). “Whakapapa”, in this way, highlights the inter-dependence of all things for well-being, and the reciprocal relationships which exist between people and the natural world.

Unlike an approach to the natural world which views people as the principal (if not sole) end of concern, human beings are understood to be only one part of a creation story that weaves together all things in the universe (Marsden, 2003a). The starting point for such an approach to the natural world is relational – value is derived from our co-existence and shared descent. Well-being and development is bound up with the natural world – good development enables and expands good relationships between people and between people and the natural world. More than this, good relationships are those marked by obligations and treating the natural world as the “kaitiaki” (trustees) would. As kaitiaki (trustees) we ought to treat land, waterways and natural resources with “aroha” (love) and “manaaki” (care); we ought to understand ourselves as *belonging to* rather than having *ownership of* the natural world (Marsden, 2003a, 2003b).

The closest idea to ownership [in Māori society] was that of the private use of a limited number of personal things such as garments, weapons, combs. Apart from this all other use of land, waters, forests, fisheries, was a communal and/or tribal right. All natural resources, all life was birthed from Mother Earth. Thus the resources of the earth did not belong to man but rather, man belonged to the earth, Man as well as animal, bird, fish could harvest the bounty of mother earth's resources but they did not own them. Man had but “user-rights”. (Marsden, 2003b, p. 67)

The place of the natural world within Māori worldviews tend to depart from the way in which it is framed within current articulations of the capability approach (Kawharu, 2000; Tunks, 2002; Waitangi Tribunal Report, 2011). Importantly, Māori philosophies typically agree (with Sen and Nussbaum) that we can enhance the natural world and the lives of non-human animals, just as much as they are able to enhance our lives. A fundamental difference is that Māori philosophies also take this to be a mutual obligation. As kin, we have an obligation to enhance the natural world just as the natural world (as our kin) has an obligation to enhance our lives.

Rethinking the capability approach

There are at least two points to make about how Māori worldviews impact on how the natural world might be valued. The first is that it raises the general question of how human beings ought to relate to nature. Within Sen's account, the answer is that the natural world matters for the substantive freedoms of current and future people. The current generation must leave behind a "generalised capacity to create well-being", rather than "any particular thing or any particular resource" (Anand & Sen, 2000, p. 2035). Sen's lack of content is partly what allows him to include diverse values, so it looks promising. It means that Sen leaves room for Māori philosophies (indeed any philosophy) that holds different views on the value of the natural world.

The danger of this view, however, is that not valuing nature for its own sake allows that natural resources can be substituted – particular lands, waterways and resources need not be preserved as such, but only the general capacity to create well-being. This view is likely to exclude (and impose) certain ways of valuing and relating to the environment (Scholtes, 2010). For instance, Māori (and other indigenous peoples) typically view themselves as being *of* the land and natural world – belonging to it, rather than having ownership over it. In such a view, it is difficult to accept that particular land, waterways and natural resources, so fundamental to identity, can be substituted. This is a significant point when we take into account that many island nations are expected to be uninhabitable not too far into the future (IPCC, 2014). How different cultures relate to nature, and how they understand well-being, culture and their obligations over time, will bear on how this challenge impacts on their lives and well-being. Cultural groups whose identities are intimately bound up with particular lands and landscapes will face serious challenges of cultural survival (Heyward, 2014).

Another problem with Sen's theory is that there are only human freedom-centred reasons to value nature. A human freedom-centred account of well-being leaves the natural world and non-human beings which lack agency in what seems an extremely vulnerable position. With such a view, the value of the natural world depends entirely on what individuals and people value. This raises two key issues. Firstly, it is not clear that this approach to the natural world is enough to encapsulate certain worldviews. Māori, for example, tend to value the natural world for its own sake. In such a view, there is (in principle) reason to preserve land, waterways, and natural resources even in the absence of, and for reasons quite apart from, human freedom alone (Watene, 2011).

The second issue is that it becomes increasingly unclear exactly what Māori peoples have *reason* to value. More pertinently, a serious question arises about whether marginalised groups – such as indigenous peoples – are able to act on their values, given the constraints they face. An important section of the Brundtland Report on sustainable development focuses on "Empowering Vulnerable Groups" (World Commission on Environment & Development [WCED], 1987). The report acknowledges that although development often integrates communities into larger social and economic frameworks, indigenous and tribal communities can remain isolated because of "physical barriers to communication or marked differences in social and cultural practises" (Jull, 2003). It further acknowledges the importance of traditional knowledge in ensuring that indigenous peoples are able to thrive in isolated environments, and concludes that recognition of traditional rights must give local communities a decisive voice in decisions about resource use in their area (Jull, 2003). In practice, however, it is difficult to ensure that indigenous peoples are consulted in processes such as these. Due to cultural differences, such as those mentioned above, it may be that Māori peoples have *reason* to value an approach to the

natural world which is quite different from the prominent accounts given by (for instance) Nussbaum and Sen. In practice, however, it is not entirely clear whether Māori peoples (given current external conditions resulting from colonisation) are *able* to undertake activities that are consistent with what they value.

In some ways, Nussbaum appears to provide a framework which is able to get closer to Māori values. Most obviously, this is because Nussbaum includes non-human animals within her conception of dignity. From here, Nussbaum's conception of dignity could be extended to include the natural world, even though she does not do so. More than this, the spiritual dimensions of the concepts of “mauri”, “mana” and “tapu” could be captured by a modified version of innate dignity; that is, a conception of dignity which moves beyond rationality and animality to also include spirituality. As it stands, however, Nussbaum interprets the value of the environment in instrumental terms. While she goes further than Sen by including non-human animals, the environment itself is not valuable for its own sake. Dignity is not a concept or starting point which extends to include the natural world directly. The approach restricts the scope to those creatures to whom the (relevant) capabilities apply. In the end, Nussbaum's theory is more restrictive than Sen's. While Sen's theory cannot fully appreciate Māori values that are not grounded in human freedom, his theory is open to them. Nussbaum's conception of dignity excludes these values from the start (Watene, 2011).

Sen and Nussbaum share theories which encourage, require, and rely on cross-cultural participatory dialogue. This is a feature of their theories which is commendable and which proponents of the capability approach ought to take seriously. However, their theories (partly due to their incompleteness) look to limit and restrict the nature of these conversations, and without further examination will leave us without a clear way of moving forward. Sen's theory, while requiring deliberative democracy in virtue of the value of agency, looks to exclude ways of valuing nature (allowing for resources to be substituted). Nussbaum's dignity-based theory – bringing rationality and animality together – leaves the natural world outside the scope of the theory. Within both of their theories, there is not enough scope to guarantee that all voices – and more particularly a Māori voice – will be heard.

Conclusion

There are deep differences in how different cultures value, and think about their obligations to, the natural world. These differences give rise to disagreements (in practice) about what constitutes well-being and how development theorists and practitioners ought to think about land, waterways and natural resources. In order to truly include, and speak to, all of the values which exist, or at least to try to do so, proponents of the capability approach need to revisit basic assumptions and core concepts, to extend them beyond their current limitations. They need to invest more in learning about how other people relate to the natural world and about how current capability-based framings may not be inclusive of them. Māori tribal groups have been working in ways which bring Mātāuranga (traditional knowledge) into conversation with western science. They are developing ways of measuring the cultural health of land and water and are working to enhance the physical and spiritual aspects of land and water (see, for instance, Kahui-McConnell, 2012; Waikato-Tainui Te Kauhanganui Incorporated, 2013; Waitangi Tribunal Report, 2011). Māori (and other indigenous) perspectives are able to contribute to this much-needed cross-cultural dialogue. Highlighting how capability theories are formulated provides us with one way of underlining these differences and of generating this discussion. Both rethinking capability theories and looking for spaces beyond the capability approach are required to make development conversations truly inclusive and truly global.

Disclosure statement

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Notes on contributor

Krushil Watene is of Māori (Ngāti Manu, Te Hikutu, Ngāti Whātua o Orākei) and Tongan descent. She has been involved in a number of action research projects with Ngāti Whātua o Orākei, and is currently a member of the Ngāti Manu governance group which protects the mauri of Taumārere river.

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