UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE MINAS GERAIS

Faculdade de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas

Programa de Pós-Graduação em Filosofia

Samuel Sousa de Azevedo Maia

A New Look into Peter Townsend's Holy Grail: The Theory and Measure of Poverty as Relative Deprivation

Belo Horizonte

2024

Samuel Sousa de Azevedo Maia

A New Look into Peter Townsend's Holy Grail: The Theory and Measure of Poverty as Relative Deprivation

Dissertação apresentada ao Programa de Pós-graduação (PPG) em Filosofia da Faculdade de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais como requisito para a obtenção do título de Mestre em Filosofia.

Linha de Pesquisa: Lógica, Ciência, Mente e Linguagem

Orientador: Prof. Dr. Ernesto Perini Frizzera da Mota Santos (PPG em Filosofia da UFMG)
Coorientadora: Professora Dra. Sibelle Cornélio Diniz (Cedeplar-UFMG)

Belo Horizonte
2024

100
M217n
2024

Maia, Samuel Sousa de Azevedo.
A new look into Peter Townsend's holy grail: [manuscript] : the theory and measure of poverty as relative deprivation / Samuel Sousa de Azevedo Maia. – 2024.
200 f.
Orientador: Ernesto Perini Frizzera da Mota Santos.
Coorientadora: Sibelle Cornélio Diniz.

Dissertação (mestrado) – Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Faculdade de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas.
Inclui bibliografia

1. Filosofia – Teses 2. Pobreza – Teses. 3. Townsend, Peter, 1928-2009. 4. Valores sociais – Teses. 5. Indicadores sociais – Teses. I. Perini-Santos, E. (Ernesto) II. Diniz, Sibelle Cornélio. III. Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. Faculdade de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas. IV. Título.

Ficha catalográfica elaborada por Vilma Carvalho de Souza – Bibliotecária – CRB-6/1390

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE MINAS GERAIS
FACULDADE DE FILOSOFIA E CIÊNCIAS HUMANAS
PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM FILOSOFIA

ATA DE DEFESA DE DISSERTAÇÃO

SAMUEL SOUSA DE AZEVEDO MAIA

Realizou-se, no dia 31 de janeiro de 2024, às 14 horas, por meio de sessão em plataforma eletrônica virtual, a defesa de dissertação, intitulada *A New Look into Peter Townsend's Holy Grail: The Theory and Measure of Poverty as Relative Deprivation*, apresentada por **SAMUEL SOUSA DE AZEVEDO MAIA**, número de registro 2020657311, graduado no curso de FILOSOFIA, como requisito parcial para a obtenção do grau de Mestre em FILOSOFIA, à seguinte Comissão Examinadora: Prof. Ernesto Perini Frizzera da Mota Santos - Orientador (UFMG), Profa. Sibelle Cornelio Diniz da Costa - Coorientadora (UFMG), Prof. Alessandro Pinzani (UFSC), Profa. Nancy Lynn Cartwright (University of Durham) e Prof. Pedro Herculano Guimarães Ferreira de Souza (UERJ).

A Comissão considerou a dissertação:

(X) Aprovada, com média final 100 (cem)

( ) Reprovada

Finalizados os trabalhos, lavrei a presente ata que, lida e aprovada, vai assinada pelos membros da Comissão.

Belo Horizonte, 31 de janeiro de 2024.

Prof. Ernesto Perini Frizzera da Mota Santos - Orientador (Doutor)

Profa. Sibelle Cornelio Diniz da Costa - Coorientadora (Doutora)

Prof. Alessandro Pinzani (Doutor)

Profa. Nancy Lynn Cartwright (Doutora)

Prof. Pedro Herculano Guimarães Ferreira de Souza (Doutor)

Documento assinado eletronicamente por **Alessandro Pinzani**, **Usuário Externo**, em 01/02/2024, às 08:44, conforme horário oficial de Brasília, com fundamento no art. 5º do Decreto nº 10.543, de 13 de novembro de 2020.

Documento assinado eletronicamente por **Pedro Herculano Guimarães Ferreira de Souza**, **Usuário Externo**, em 01/02/2024, às 14:00, conforme horário oficial de Brasília, com fundamento no art. 5º do Decreto nº 10.543, de 13 de novembro de 2020.

Documento assinado eletronicamente por **Ernesto Perini Frizzera da Mota Santos**, **Professor do Magistério Superior**, em 02/02/2024, às 07:13, conforme horário oficial de Brasília, com fundamento no art. 5° do Decreto n° 10.543, de 13 de novembro de 2020.

Documento assinado eletronicamente por **Sibelle Cornelio Diniz da Costa**, **Professora do Magistério Superior**, em 02/02/2024, às 11:43, conforme horário oficial de Brasília, com fundamento no art. 5° do Decreto n° 10.543, de 13 de novembro de 2020.

Documento assinado eletronicamente por **Nancy Lynn Cartwright**, **Usuária Externa**, em 06/02/2024, às 05:44, conforme horário oficial de Brasília, com fundamento no art. 5° do Decreto n° 10.543, de 13 de novembro de 2020.

A autenticidade deste documento pode ser conferida no site https://sei.ufmg.br/sei/controlador_externo.php?acao=documento_conferir&id_orgao_acesso_externo=0, informando o código verificador **2979262** e o código CRC **F864FC83**.

Referência: Processo n° 23072.203602/2024-54 SEI n° 2979262

Para Abadia, que como outras Marias, tem a estranha mania de ter fé na vida.

To Abadia, whose uncanny mania is believing in life, just like many Marias.

Acknowledgements

i. Prefatory remarks

Despite the centrality of poverty in our world, there is a noticeable absence of its account coming from the great names in the history of Western philosophy. I invite the reader just to compare this absence with the extensive treatment of the problem of human equality or inequality by modern political philosophers, such as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. One might say that Adam Smith and Karl Marx made significant observations on issues surrounding poverty, which is true. But they did not provide a thorough account of poverty as such, focusing more on related though distinct notions like "necessaries" and "subsistence-wage" (Allen: 2013: 1). This despite the political and economic life of pre- and industrial Europe for centuries being animated by the concept of poverty.[i] It was only in this century that the topic of poverty began to be addressed more directly and thoroughly in philosophy.[ii]

The recent focus within philosophical literature aims at discussing and making explicit the normative aspects involved in the way poverty is perceived and treated in our social and political lives. There, the most widely employed methodologies are the so-called "non-ideal theories of justice" (*e.g.*, Wolff *et al.*, 2015: 6-7) and critical theory (*e.g.*, Schweiger, 2020b).[iii] Initially more restricted to the issue of global poverty and its relation to debates on global justice (*e.g.*, Pogge, 2008; Wisor, 2012), the last fifteen years have seen the rise of philosophical treatments of issues related to poverty at the national level. This literature has predominantly focused on poverty within the European context, so far at least.[iv]

---

[i] The same absence of tackling poverty is found in modern towering of political philosophers like John Rawls. Amartya Sen is an exception, but I should note that besides being a philosopher, he is also an economist.

[ii] To be sure, my focus here is on philosophical works about poverty written in English – regardless of the author's native language. However, while I am omitting important and original contributions from non-Anglophone literature, such as those by the Spanish philosopher Adela Cortina (2017), it is worth noting that these works are also quite recent.

[iii] It is true that some older works connect the issue of poverty with the problem of basal equality or what is called the "currency" of justice in political philosophy. Still, these works are not within the mainstream of the field. For further reading on this, see Wolff *et al.* (2015: 7-8; 35). I discuss this point in ***Section 1.2.1*** and in note 6 in this thesis' ***Conclusion***.

[iv] A non-exhaustive list is Hull (2007); Wolff and De-Shalit (2007); Springer's collection *Philosophy of Poverty*; and *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy and Poverty* (Schweiger & Sedmak, 2024). One must also acknowledge the precedence of Shaw (1988) in discussing the problem of the absolute or relative character of poverty that I will discuss in ***Section 3.1.1.b***.

However, there is a sparse but growing body of work that focuses on poverty in the Global South. Two notable contributions from Latin America warrant mention. The first is the pioneering work of the Mexican philosopher Paulette Dieterlen (2005), who discusses poverty with a distinct philosophical gaze. More important than this, Dieterlen applied what she calls an "ethical conception of poverty" to the analysis of a specific and important government policy to combat it in Mexico, the conditional cash transfer *Progresa-Oportunidades-Prospera*. The second contribution comes from the Brazilian philosopher Alessandro Pinzani and the Brazilian sociologist Walquiria Rego. They conducted a series of interviews with women that received conditional cash transfers from another famous policy, Brazil's *Programa Bolsa Família*. Pinzani and Leão analyzed the impact of these transfers in the lives of these women in light of the capabilities approach, critical theory, and hermeneutics (Pinzani & Rego, 2019).[v]

This thesis is indebted to this literature, sharing its focus on eminently normative and conceptual aspects of poverty. Nonetheless, it is in a sense somewhat peculiar: methodological issues related to the treatment of poverty by the social sciences are often relegated to the background by this literature. These issues are treated, so to speak, as exogenous elements within the philosophical analysis.[vi] This is why another influential element in this thesis is the recent discussions in philosophy over a specific scientific activity: scientific measurement.[vii]

This work concludes a cycle of my intellectual training that has seen some changes in its path: from law to philosophy, and more recently, to the social sciences. An optimistic interpretation would suggest that such a crooked path reflects a long-standing fascination with the convergences and divergences between the epistemic and the normative world – my interest in poverty and its measurement reflecting this. This is why discovering Peter Townsend's work on poverty was fortuitous, no doubt, especially since Townsend thought through these convergences and

---

[v] Of course, we cannot ignore those social scientists who, since the early days of scientific investigations of the social world, already applied what might be called "philosophical tools" – understood here as conceptual and methodological reasoning, together with awareness of normative issues – to inform their studies around the description and explanation of poverty. Since early 20th Century sociology, for instance, we have had works like George Simmel's *The Poor* (Simmel; Jacobson, 1965 [1907]), not to mention works of those like Seebohm Rowntree, about whom we will talk later. More recently, there have been treatments of poverty in the social sciences with strong methodological and normative awareness in welfare and development economics. To mention just a few, we have the likes of Paul Streeten, Anthony Atkinson, Oscar Altimir, and, in Brazil, of Celia Kerstenetzky, Flavio Comin, and Marcelo Medeiros.

[vi] Important exceptions are the already mentioned work of Pinzani and Rego (2019); the excellent collection dedicated to issues of poverty research from the perspective of philosophy of science and epistemology by Beck *et al.* (2020); the work of Monique Deveaux (*e.g.*, 2021); and the work of Katarina Pitasse Fragoso (*e.g.*, Fragoso & Lemay, 2024).

[vii] Some recent and reference works in the philosophy of measurement are Chang (2004); Reiss (2008); Boumans (2015); Bradburn *et al.* (2017); Alexandrova (2017); and Mari *et al.* (2021).

divergences while developing his theory of poverty. Through this thesis, I hope to make a case for the fruitfulness of his quest for a non-arbitrary, or "scientific," poverty line – something that critics have called "Townsend's Holy Grail." Holy or not, I think this is a grail to which it is worth applying the chisel.[viii]

ii. A note on quotations

This thesis is composed in American English. However, a significant portion of the quotations comes from texts written in British English, including works by Peter Townsend. To preserve the integrity of the quoted material, I have sacrificed consistency and retained its original British spelling.

iii. Acknowledgments proper

Like all the others, this text is the product of a series of experiences and encounters, to which I owe a large part of its ideas – along with its eventual qualities, though not its more certain shortcomings.

I had the privilege of presenting parts of this work at venues at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, the Universidade Federal do Maranhão, the Universidade Federal de Campina Grande, the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, at the *Encontro da ANPOF 2022*, as well as at the *Economics and Philosophy Study Group*, coordinated by Raphael Gomes and Wagner Oliveira. I also discussed some ideas at the *Workshop: Thick Concepts* and at the *Engaging Ethics and Epistemology in Science Meeting*, both joint events of Leibniz University and Bielefeld University; at the virtual symposium of the *Values in Medicine, Science, and Technology Conference*, of the University of Texas at Dallas; at the *Philosophy of Social Sciences Roundtable 2021*, of the University of Nebraska; at the *Cambridge Early Career Workshop in the Philosophy of Measurement*, of the University of Cambridge; at the *Normative problems in the conditional model of social protection*, of the University of Salzburg and the Argentinean Research Center; and at the *Philosophy of Science Around the World 2023*, of the Philosophy of Science Association. I am extremely grateful to the organizers of all these events for the opportunity to join them mainly online (a silver lining of the tragic Covid-19 pandemic). There, I had the privilege of receiving valuable comments and criticisms from Alex Mussgnug, Daniel Katz, Eran Tal, Miguel

[viii] I borrowed this metallurgy and carpentry metaphor from the British philosopher Bernard Williams (1995: 247).

Ohnesorge, and especially Anna Alexandrova. Cristian Larroulet Philippi, Daniel Katz, Facundo García Valverde, Jonathan Downey, Raphael Gomes, and Vitor Sommavilla were willing to discuss some ideas in more detail. I also owe a lot to Chris Renwick, Peter Townsend's biographer, who lent me some of his cherished unpublished findings on Townsend's life and thoughts.

I also would like to express my gratitude to the external members of my examination committee: Alessandro Pinzani, Nancy Cartwright, and Pedro de Souza. Each of these scholars commands my profound admiration and I am truly appreciative of their insightful and challenging comments on my thesis. While the core remains the same, in this final version, I have endeavored to do justice to at least some of their contributions.

At my home institution, the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, my gratitude extends to many. Thanks to the Face and Fafich Libraries and the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Philosophy departments' technical-administrative staff – especially Vilma Carvalho and André Ferreira, whose patience, attention, and services were indispensable. Similarly, Ione Machado's diligent work and punctuality were essential to my progress.

Professors Amaro Fleck, Antônio Coelho, Carla Ferretti, Carlos Eduardo Suprinyak, Eduardo Soares Neves, Fernando Rey Puente, Helton Adverse, Henrique Napoleão Alves, Lívia Guimarães, Newton Bignotto, Patrícia Kauark, and Virgínia Figueiredo have all, in one way or another, made an impression on me with their admirable and exciting intellectual finesse and rigor. They were always patient and generous in responding to my endless questions and comments, whether through emails or during and – *especially* – at the end of their classes. In particular, professors Leonardo Ribeiro and André Abath taught me the beauty of theoretical sophistication and served as examples of scholarly virtue. Both accompanied my first research experiences and I thank them for the opportunity and trust. Abílio Rodrigues accepted an invitation to organize a free course on misinformation, post-truth and fake news in the midst of the pandemic, which in many ways influenced the way I now conceive the interaction between politics and science. Rogério Lopes gave me the opportunity to organize another course, this one on contemporary theories of justice. There I understood a little more about the intellectual and practical significance of political philosophy. More: Rogério gave me invaluable support and attention at pivotal moments. Finally, Ivan Domingues and Telma Birchal have always taught me, by example and gesture, how intellectual generosity and affection can be combined with academic excellence and institutional commitment.

I am thankful to my friends, Adam Kirst, Adilson Ribeiro, Jean Gabriel, Matheus Dabnei, and especially to Augusto Gaioli, Eduardo Teodoro, Júlio César, and Matheus Pereira. I miss those bitter but sweet coffees at the Fafich canteen, amidst discussions worthy of "Frege's barbers."

Countless conversations with Ana Corsino, Mateus Leite, and Renata Guimarães provided me with therapeutic doses of empathy and reasonableness. To be fair, many of my ideas here are not solely my own. They are intertwined with those of Mateus, a brother with whom conversations and discussions over the last few years have served as a laboratory for the closest thing I have to a world view. Mateus also read the whole thesis, and I hope he helped me to make it a bit like his thinking: clearer and more consistent.

Larissa Muniz provided the most sensitive and sharp criticism. Above all, she was a source of dialogue, encouragement, and love for pursuing my intellectual and practical interests. It was a gift from her that largely explains this thesis.

There is no doubt that I owe the greatest academic debt to those who advised me during this master's. Right from the beginning, my advisor Ernesto Perini-Santos was open and tolerant of a somewhat heterodox research project and topic. With him, I hoped that the text would acquire some of his philosophical wit and boldness. At the beginning of my unfinished law degree, I could take an introduction to economics course with Sibelle Diniz. Later on, I was able to have Sibelle as a co-supervisor, when I could revisit and deepen many of the methodological and normative issues in economics that have fascinated me for years. My sincere thanks to both for showing me that delving into Townsend's theory was worthwhile, and for their patience and support throughout this journey of growth. I am a better researcher because of them.

Home is a nurturing space. It was there that Mafalda instilled in me an appreciation for the beauty and value of simple affections. And more than anyone else, my mother, Denise, and my father, Marcos, have shaped who I am, and molded my thoughts and feelings. (I repeat: this of course does not imply they bear responsibility for this thesis, as the conventional disclaimer goes.) Their material and emotional support have been indispensable and I owe them both my love of knowledge and love for thy neighbor.

I dedicate this thesis to my grandmother, *Maria Abadia*, a pragmatist by birth. Her life teaches me why putting our thoughts at the service of good and fair living is a form of love.

It maybe worth reflecting, if indeed a little sadly, that possibly the ultimate test of the quality of a free, democratic and prosperous society is to be found in the standards of freedom, democracy and prosperity enjoyed by its most deprived members.

Peter Townsend [*]

[*] Quote adapted from Townsend (1964: 438).

Abstract

The development of the science of poverty has largely been driven by the need to define more precisely what poverty is, as well as to provide theoretical and empirical criteria for identifying those who suffer from it. This thesis focuses on a notable response to these and related questions: the conception and measure of poverty by the British sociologist Peter Townsend. Townsend defines poverty as relative deprivation caused by lack of resources. This conception, along with his corresponding cut-off measure, constitutes some of the key components of his theory of poverty. The theory aims to answer what poverty *is*, its *causes*, and how it can be *eradicated*, and is detailed in *Poverty in the United Kingdom: A Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living* (1979), his *magnum opus*. The primary aim of this thesis is to interpret the theory from Townsend's adherence to the value-free ideal. He pursued this ideal in response to what he perceived as the pervasive and deleterious influence of moral and political values on measures, theories, and policies on poverty throughout its scientific and political history. I argue that to be free from such influence, Townsend aimed to be as guided by epistemic values as possible, which resulted in a systematic theory of poverty.

The thesis is structured as follows: In Chapter 1, I situate Townsend's conception and measurement of poverty within the context of both the recent history of scientific poverty lines and the most important approaches to measuring the phenomenon. Chapter 2 discusses the systematic nature of the theory, including its role as a middle-range theory that bridges broad-range theories with empirical data. This connection is achieved through several elements: a conception of poverty; hypotheses and anthropological observations related to the elements of the conception; measures to test these hypotheses; an explanation of poverty; and reports on how the research was conducted. Furthermore, Townsend's theory aligns with Bradburn *et al.*'s (2017) measurement theory, which asserts that a good measure must include a conception of the relevant phenomenon, a representation, and procedures to gather the relevant data. Additionally, all three components must be supported by arguments showing that they fit together properly.

In the remaining chapters, I present and discuss the main elements of the theory: his conception of poverty as relative deprivation caused by lack of resources, along with the related hypotheses and observations (Chapter 3); the representations of this conception and the procedures for data collection, processing, as well as ensuring their reliability (Chapter 4); and the explanation of poverty (Chapter 5). I conclude by presenting what Townsend considered the "policy prescriptions" of his theory. Despite its potential shortcomings, I also argue that Townsend's theory fulfills an important epistemic value: fruitfulness.

Keywords: poverty measurement; theory of poverty; value-free ideal; systematicity; Peter Townsend.

Resumo

O desenvolvimento da ciência da pobreza foi, em grande parte, impulsionado pela necessidade de definir com mais precisão o que é pobreza, bem como de fornecer critérios teóricos e empíricos para identificar aqueles que dela sofrem. Esta dissertação se concentra em uma resposta notável a essas e outras questões fundamentais: a concepção e a medida de pobreza do sociólogo britânico Peter Townsend. Townsend define a pobreza como privação relativa causada pela falta de recursos. Essa concepção, juntamente com sua "medida de corte" correspondente, constitui alguns dos principais componentes de sua teoria da pobreza. A teoria procura responder o que a pobreza *é*, suas *causas*, e como ela pode ser *erradicada*, e é detalhada em sua obra magna, *Poverty in the United Kingdom: A Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living* (1979). O principal objetivo desta dissertação é interpretar a teoria a partir da adesão de Townsend ao ideal de liberdade de valores. Sua busca por esse ideal foi motivada pelo que considerava ser uma influência generalizada e deletéria dos valores morais e políticos nas medidas, teorias e políticas sobre a pobreza ao longo da história científica e política do fenômeno. Argumento que para se livrar dessa influência, Townsend buscou ser o mais guiado possível por valores epistêmicos, o que se traduziu no desenvolvimento de uma teoria sistemática da pobreza.

Esta é a estrutura da dissertação: No Capítulo 1, situo a concepção e a mensuração da pobreza de Townsend no contexto tanto da história recente das linhas de pobreza científicas quanto das mais importantes abordagens para sua mensuração. O Capítulo 2 discute a natureza sistemática da teoria, incluindo seu papel como uma teoria de médio alcance que funciona como ponte entre teorias de escopo amplo e dados empíricos. Essa conexão é alcançada por meio de vários elementos: uma concepção de pobreza; hipóteses e observações antropológicas relacionadas aos elementos constitutivos da concepção; medidas para testar essas hipóteses; uma explicação da pobreza; e relatos sobre como a pesquisa foi conduzida. Além disso, a teoria de Townsend se alinha a teoria de mensuração de Bradburn *et al.* (2017), segundo a qual uma boa medida deve ter uma concepção do fenômeno em questão, uma representação, e procedimentos para coleta dos dados relevantes. Acrescentando-se a isso, devem ser fornecidos argumentos que mostram que esses três componentes estão numa relação adequada.

Nos capítulos restantes, apresento e discuto os principais elementos da teoria: sua concepção de pobreza como privação relativa causada pela falta de recursos, junto das hipóteses e observações relacionadas (Capítulo 3); as representações dessa concepção e os procedimentos de coleta e processamento de dados, bem como a garantia de sua confiabilidade (Capítulo 4); e a explicação da pobreza (Capítulo 5). Concluo apresentando o que Townsend considerava as "prescrições para políticas públicas" de sua teoria. Apesar de suas possíveis deficiências, também argumento que a teoria de Townsend atende a um importante valor epistêmico: ela é frutífera.

Palavras-chave: mensuração da pobreza; teoria da pobreza; ideal de liberdade de valores; sistematicidade; privação relativa; Peter Townsend.

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CRP – Norman Bradburn, Nancy Cartwright, and Jonathan Fuller's Measurement Theory

CPAG – Child Poverty Action Group

EU – European Union

FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

HDI – Human Development Index

IPL – World Bank's International Poverty Line

LSE – London School of Economics and Political Science

MPI – Multidimensional Poverty Index from the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative and United Nations Development Program

PITUK – *Poverty in the United Kingdom: A Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living* (Townsend, 1979)

UBN – Unsatisfied Basic Needs Approach

UNDP – United Nations Development Program

UK – United Kingdom

US – United States of America

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

> Esmeralda was on her feet and crying. I looked around their sparsely furnished shack. The only things in abundance were the skinny and barefoot children. I saw that the stove was unlit. I thought, In a house with many children, by this time the beans should be cooking. The children looked sad. Where there is nothing to eat people can't be happy. The poor are the students of a teacher named hunger. I looked at Esmeralda, whose back was turned. She prayed, the strangest prayer I have ever heard. It went this way:
> "My Lord Jesus: I am so poor that I have no resource. I am with pains of labor and pain in my heart because I have nothing in my house to feed my children. I can't call the midwife because I have no money to pay her. Only you can help me, Lord Jesus."
>
> [∴] With his slow gait, I thought, he doesn't seem to have been born in nightclubs. Those nooks and crannies don't fascinate him. The sad voice of the ticket seller attracted him. He stopped there contemplating that human being inside rags. I thought: he must belong to the union of the misfortunates.
> Life for a poor man weighs as if it were a hundred thousand tons of lead in his back. The voice of the needy is so sad. And he kept begging:
> – Buy madam! Buy a little piece madam!
> They would come out impetuous, as if they were the descendants of Mary Estuart, or Marie Antoinette.
>
> Carolina Maria de Jesus[*]

We know very well what people like Esmeralda, her children, and the sad man suffer from. Esmeralda, along with the person who documents her predicament, the Brazilian writer Carolina Maria de Jesus, uses a specific term to describe this condition – and there is no doubt that they apply it correctly. Why engage in discussions about *identifying* poverty, as this thesis does? Is not the real issue the fact that we have no shortage of cases like these? After all, do we not already know that there are in the hundreds of millions, perhaps billions of Esmeraldas around the planet? Would it not make more sense, and be more urgent, to investigate how poverty can be *mitigated*, perhaps *eliminated*, and thereby free so many people from the suffering it imposes? In my defense,

[*] The first excerpt by Carolina Maria de Jesus is a translation by Arrington Jr. and Levine, with minor adaptations of mine (de Jesus, 1997 [1961]). The second excerpt is my own translation from the original Portuguese (de Jesus, 2021 [1961]). All translations of non-English texts in this thesis are my responsibility.

I am not alone: it is common for questions like these, along with their corresponding apologies, to either open or close many works dedicated to questions about what poverty *is*, how to *measure* it, and how to *identify* who suffers from it.[1]

In truth, if there are plenty of cases like Esmeralda's – where there is no doubt that we are talking about a person in poverty – we also have many situations like Anne's, as described by the British sociologist Paul Spicker:

> Imagine Anne, a single parent with two children, living in Britain. She separated from her partner three years ago, and has had no contact with him since. She lives mainly on social assistance benefits, though her income is dependent on a range of other social provisions such as tax credits, Child Benefit and Housing Benefit. Anne lives in public housing, a tenement block built in the 1950s. The apartment is spartan; it has three bedrooms, kitchen and bathroom, and although the property is in good repair it tends to be damp in winter because she cannot afford the heating. She shops for food once a week at the local supermarket. She cannot afford to go out for meals or drinks, and she does not go out very much. She generally stays at home and watches television. Anne tries to manage, but the amount of money available on benefit is very small, and she often finds herself with no money at the end of a fortnight.
>
> Is Anne poor? (Spicker, 2007: iv)

There is little doubt that Anne's situation is less dramatic than those described by Maria de Jesus. It is possible that many of the same people in Brazil who do not hesitate to call Esmeralda poor, think that Anne does not deserve to be called so. It is true that in Brazil, Spicker's question has a somewhat speculative character. But in rich European countries, such as Germany and the United Kingdom (UK), it actually has animated and still animates public, political, and academic debate about poverty. It is also true that the number of people in conditions like Esmeralda's has grown in recent years, even in these richer countries. But the question remains: does it make sense to include in the list of people in poverty the large contingent of citizens like Anne? These citizens, while not in such misery as Esmeralda, still spend their lives amidst various deprivations, especially when compared to their more fortunate compatriots. Poverty may be a serious social and political problem, even in high-income countries. In fact, whether people like Anne are poor

[1] Instances of similar apologies at the beginning of works are Sen (1981: vii); Grusky and Weeden (2013: 20); Atkinson (2019); and Schweiger (2020a: 173).

is only one of several questions around the meaning of poverty that occupy political and academic debates.

It could be argued, nonetheless, that this discussion is unimportant for developing countries like Brazil, where the number of Esmeraldas is so big that there would be no reason to waste time on terminological or conceptual issues of this kind. But some statistics show that this might not be the case. A study by World Bank economists Shaohua Chen and Martin Ravallion (2013), shows that according to a measure of such extreme poverty like Esmeralda's predicament, the number of people in poverty in developing countries *decreased* from 1990 to 2008. However, according to another measure designed to measure the number of people sharing Anne's predicament, the number of people in poverty in the same developing countries *increased* in the period from 1981 to 2008.[2] What is the rationale behind different measures that produce different such results about the same population?

The development of the science of poverty to a large extent aimed to clarify these disparate views by trying to define more precisely what poverty is, and also to provide theoretical and empirical criteria to identify who is in poverty. Defining and identifying are not only crucial for tracking the extent and evolution of poverty within a population. They are also essential for finding the causes of poverty, predicting its trends, and designing interventions to fight it. The scientific study of poverty also aims to provide governments with the tools to identify beneficiaries of public policies to help people in poverty; in fact, this was the goal that mainly spurred the development of this science. The products of this scientific research are also key tools for social mobilization demanding a societal and governmental response to this phenomenon. Whether we are explaining, predicting, intervening, selecting beneficiaries, or mobilizing action against poverty – describing poverty is fundamental for all these activities.

This thesis focuses on a notable answer given to these and other fundamental questions that any scientific description of poverty must deal with. I am referring to the conception and measure of poverty by the British sociologist Peter Townsend – respectively, poverty as relative deprivation caused by lack of resources *and his* cut-off measure. *Each of which constitute the main*

[2] Chen and Ravallion (2013) show a decrease in absolute poverty, that is, poverty according to the International Poverty Line, and an increase in poverty according to a measure of relative poverty developed by the authors. The notions of absolute and relative poverty will be presented and discussed below (***Section 3.1.1.b***).

products of Townsend's theory about what poverty is, *what are its* causes, *and how it can be* eliminated.

i. Crucial choices

To place these issues into a broader conceptual landscape, let me begin by first asking what poverty *is*. It is almost a consensus in the scientific literature that poverty is *deprivation*. But not any kind of deprivation. For instance, I may be deprived of the talent to play football (as in fact, I am), but this should not be taken as a reason to consider that I am in poverty. Take Esmeralda and the poor man as presented by Maria de Jesus. They are in poverty for sure. But what is the *thing* they are deprived of that puts them in poverty? What kind of *object* their deprivation is? One might claim they are deprived of objects as different as *food*, deprived of economic *resources*, of *happy feelings*, of the satisfaction of their most *basic needs*, of the *typical customs or services of their community*[3] – and thereby deprived of the mere possibility of enjoying fundamental human *achievements* or *rights*. Then, a science of poverty must precisify what kind of deprivation constitutes poverty; or to put it differently, must determine poverty's *space of deprivation*.

A pivotal question in the scientific study of poverty concerns what this space of deprivation is. This question is related to another one, about the *concept* of poverty. Like other concepts that are the object of the social sciences, the concept of poverty is already present in ordinary discourse. And like other concepts that are the object of the social sciences, it alludes and refers to different and often contradictory notions and things in the world. An important step in any scientific endeavor consists in turning these unsystematic concepts more precise and unambiguous. This involves providing a *conception* of the concept of poverty. A conception of poverty is crucial in any description-related activity in poverty research, especially those related to quantitative questions like measuring its extent and depth.

Different conceptions of poverty animate different *measures* of poverty. Measures are representational devices that allow us to answer in quantitative terms the description-related

[3] Esmeralda is deprived of midwifery, a transcultural customary practice since immemorial times. Think about indigenous midwives in Brazil's Amazon (Patriani, 2022) and their role, akin to the midwives mentioned in Exodus 1:20-21 (Bible's New International Version): "So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own."

questions we have just mentioned. Designing a measure of poverty, as well as developing or adopting a conception of it, involves a *set of choices* (Sen, 1980b). Some of these choices can lead to the identification of different individuals as being in poverty or, as Chen and Ravallion discovered about developing countries since the 1980s, can alter our conclusions about poverty dynamics across entire populations.

The discipline of economics provides broadly accepted conceptions and measures of poverty. There, poverty is often conceptualized as well-being (or "welfare," which I consider synonymous here) deprivation, that is, well-being is poverty's space of deprivation. In turn, it is often believed that a person's economic resources are a good track of her well-being. This means that poverty is measured through an *indicator* of someone's well-being, and typical indicators are someone's income or consumption. The space of deprivation and its indicator are the two elements that constitute an *approach* in poverty measurement. We can interpret the development of the scientific literature on poverty as the advancement of different approaches for measuring it. Some of the main approaches for measuring poverty developed since the early 20th Century include: *economic resources* (or simply *monetary*) deprivation; *subsistence* deprivation; *basic needs* deprivation; *relative* deprivation; *basic capabilities* deprivation; or *human rights* deprivation.

Suppose that we take poverty to be well-being deprivation and income as its most adequate indicator. Is this enough to answer the description-related questions that interest us? People like Esmeralda and the sad poor man certainly have so little income that they may be unanimously taken to be in poverty. But if we want to ascertain how many people across a country like Brazil live similarly, we need more. After all, we cannot visit every household or interview every person in the streets to check their living conditions. But even if we were able to do so, not all cases will be of such "obvious want and squalor."[4] We will probably find fewer clear-cut cases, and this will ask for more precise criteria. This is why we may need to set the *level* of income below which people are in poverty and above which they are not. Doing so translates into determining where to draw the *poverty line*.

[4] I am referring to the less rigorous criteria used in Seebohm Rowntree's pioneering survey of poverty in York. I will present Rowntree soon. His approach to poverty measurement will be discussed in ***Section 1.3.2***.

A notable poverty line is the World Bank's International Poverty Line (IPL). In rough terms, it identifies as in poverty those people living with or less than US$ 2.15 a day.[5] For those who believe that the IPL is a good indicator of poverty, a detailed inquiry into every single aspect of individuals' or families' lives is not necessary. It is sufficient to gather their income, which fortunately is information widely available through household surveys conducted worldwide. Then, for those people that fall below that line, we could infer that they have at least a common feature: they are all deprived of well-being in a manner that is characteristic of poverty.

But how should we arrive at such a line? A common practice involves adopting the maximum income threshold beyond which individuals are ineligible for social benefits, such as cash transfers and other social security schemes provided by governments or official bodies. This was the case of the IPL and of those poverty lines in Brazil and the UK which are called "*administrative"* measures of poverty.[6] Adopting administrative measures is popular but also criticized as an arbitrary procedure. After all, how were these administrative lines set in the first place? What is the guarantee that they were not the result of a prejudiced or limited view about the living conditions of deprived people, instead of a comprehensive observation of their real needs?

So far, I have presented three pivotal choices one faces when measuring poverty: its space of deprivation, indicator, and where to draw the line. There is nevertheless a more abstract, higher-level – and for that matter fundamental – choice we face when developing a conception or measure of poverty. It regards the choice over *what should guide* these and other crucial choices. In the literature of philosophy of science, this guidance is often translated into determining what *values* should orient our choices. Values like testability, explanatory power, predictive accuracy, scope (or comprehensiveness), unification, or simplicity – all are abstract guidelines for which measures, hypotheses, theories, or even conceptions a scientist should develop or choose. I am assuming in this thesis the uncontroversial claim that these kinds of values do not undermine the authority of

[5] Important features of the IPL will not be of my concern in this thesis. For instance, the IPL determines as poor those whose income is below US$ 2,15 a day in *purchasing power parity* (PPP). PPP is a widely employed (and criticized) tool to compare different purchasing power of different countries' currencies. For an in-depth discussion of its rationale and the critiques it receives, see Atkinson (2019: chs. 3 and 5).

[6] Originally established at US$ 1 a day in 1991 and based on official poverty measures from 33 countries, the IPL has since been revised to $1.25 (2005 PPP) after an analysis of 74 national poverty lines. Adjusted to $1.90 according to the 2011 PPP, its latest update was in 2022: $2.15 based on the 2017 PPP (Ferreira *et al.*, 2016).

science.[7] Such values are taken as stemming from a common understanding of what science *is*. Or, in other words, these values are taken to be *epistemic goals* for scientific enterprises like conceptualizing poverty, designing its measure, or looking for its explanation. As such they are called "*epistemic values*." For instance, suppose we need to choose the point on a society's income scale at which to draw the poverty line. We can pick the point that offers greater explanatory power by, for instance, linking poverty with other social phenomena, like unemployment, low education, or bad health. In turn, comprehensiveness would lead us to consider a poverty line that is determined by not only income but other kinds of economic resources that also influence people's deprivation, like their assets or the public services they have access to. We may also seek unification by selecting a level that allows us to relate the features of people in poverty with broader themes in social stratification, like occupational status, class structure, or differences in styles of living.

The landscape of values is also made up of values of another stripe. Take moral or political values like equality of opportunity, freedom, or meritocracy; cultural and social values like work ethic, self-sufficiency, or solidarity; personal or aesthetic values like frugality, prodigality, or authenticity. In the words of the philosopher Helen Longino, these values reflect personal, social, or cultural values of individuals and groups about what *ought to be* or about, among those things that exist, what is *best* or *good* (Longino, 1990: 4). As these values pertain to the social and cultural environment, or *context*, in which science is done, they may also influence important choices a scientist makes, consciously or not, explicitly or not. This is why Longino and others contrast them with epistemic values, calling them "*contextual values*."[8]

Indeed, some of the same scientists and philosophers of science who advocate for the appropriateness of epistemic values, also claim that science can or should be pursued without the

[7] Controversy exists regarding *which* of these and other epistemic values should be prioritized and how to *balance* two or more important but *prima facie* competing values. For instance, prioritizing simplicity may come at the expense of less comprehensiveness, and vice-versa.

[8] Three notes about calling them "contextual." First, with "contextual" I am not suggesting that I submit to contextualism in metaethics (that is, the view that which value is adequate is given by its specific context of application). Second, I could have followed the literature and called them "noncognitive" or "non-epistemic" values (*e.g.*, Longino, 1990; Lacey, 1999; Anderson, 2004; Reiss & Sprenger, 2020). However, both options could also suggest compromise with disputed metaethical views about the nature of values. In the former case, it suggests ascribing to non-cognitivism (the view that such values are not "cognitive," whatever this would mean); in the latter, to the view that these values could not be the object of rational discussion. Here, I suspend judgment on these issues.

influence of contextual values. The *value-free ideal* concerns the claim that contrary to epistemic values, contextual values are obstacles for good scientific judgment and as such should be avoided in scientific research. Contextual values are taken as sources of bias, misperception, or as simply irrelevant for making important choices like choosing between alternative theories or conceptions about a given phenomenon. When writing "values" *simpliciter*, I shall be referring to contextual values only.

One of the main arguments given in favor of value-freedom is the thesis that facts and values are fundamentally distinct. Many have argued that there is a *dichotomy* separating the two. One of the consequences of this dichotomy would be that we cannot derive a judgment of value from a judgment of fact. In the social sciences, the value-free ideal has occupied social scientists at least since Max Weber (1946 [1917]). Weber offered a notable version of this argument for value-freedom. Roughly, he argued that representing the world in a value-free manner is an important feature of modern science and one of the manifestations of his "disenchantment of the world" thesis (Weber, 1946 [1917]: 155). It is true that contextual values influence what topic a social scientist will choose to investigate, Weber claims; but once chosen the scientist should avoid the influence of these values in her activity of understanding this topic (Weber, 1946 [1917]: 146-147). This, he argues, is the only way to ensure the *objective* nature of the scientific enterprise, against which we could rationally judge those *subjective* beliefs and feelings of individuals, groups, or of whole societies. Weber's notable distinction between the social role of the scientist and that of the politician is related to this. While the former could contribute to the activities of the latter by providing politicians with an understanding of the means to achieve a given political end, Weber also argues that scientific facts often contradict political opinions and cannot base the worthiness of the ends themselves.

More recently, some philosophers of science have criticized the value-free ideal deploying a variety of arguments. Among them, Hillary Putnam (2002) has famously argued for the inevitability of contextual values in the practice of social sciences. Putnam argued that scientific concepts are one of the main *loci* of the influence of values in science (Putnam, 2002). He argued that pivotal concepts in disciplines like economics or history necessarily mix the descriptive and the normative, whereby normative here I mean influenced by contextual values. These concepts are called "*thick concepts*."

The fact and value distinction and the notion of thick concepts are among the most important topics in modern metaethics. For better or worse, both matters had achieved a level of sophistication in this subdiscipline that makes their application in philosophy of science far from trivial. But for the purposes of this thesis, it is enough to have in mind the definition of Elizabeth Anderson (2002: 504-505) and take as thick those concepts: whose application is (a) guided by empirical facts and (b) guided by evaluative choices (that is, choices that involve contextual values); and whose application (c) entails prescriptions (that is, imperatives to action).

It is also true that the last decades have seen an emerging consensus among philosophers of science that argued against value-freedom by claiming that contextual values not only *de facto* influence the products of science; but also putting forward arguments why they *should* do so (Reiss, 2021: 229). One of the ways in which this is done is by claiming for the presence of thick concepts in a variety of disciplines. Given that these concepts play pivotal roles in the theories, models, and measures, all of these theories would also be influenced by values (Alexandrova & Fabian, 2022).[9] Finally, some like Longino and Anna Alexandrova oppose Weber and argue that the influence of contextual values does not necessarily preclude science and its products from being objective (Longino, 1990; Alexandrova, 2017: ch. 4).[10]

These are contested notions and contested issues. More important is how do they all relate with the concept and measurement of poverty. Well, if contrasted with the other debates over whether a given concept is thick, the scientific measurement of poverty is a peculiar one. In fact, that poverty is a thick concept is the default position in the literature. Hence, the burden of proof here lies not on the critics but on the enthusiasts of the value-free ideal. In practice, this means that for the most part, economists and sociologists of different dispositions assume that contextual values in fact do or should guide some of the most important choices in poverty measurement.[11]

---

[9] For a good introduction to value-freedom in science, see Kincaid *et al.* (2007). Among the earliest modern discussions of thick concepts in philosophy is found in Williams (1985), and a good introduction to this topic is Kirchin (2013). But to grasp the complexity of the metaethical debate, I suggest the reader look at Väyrynen (2013). An original application of this discussion in the social sciences is found in Abend (2019). Examples of concepts in the sciences that philosophers argue are thick include: "divorce" (Anderson: 2004); "rape" (Dupré, 2007); "well-being" (Alexandrova, 2017); "addiction" (Djordojevic & Herfeld, 2021); and "inflation" (Reiss, 2021). The latter three works also explore the implications that this "thickness" holds for the activity of measurement.

[10] We will see below (note 14 in ***Chapter 3***) that Amartya Sen (1980b; 1981) also claims that science's objectivity is not necessarily undermined by contextual values.

[11] Philosophers of science like Reiss (2017: 7), Alexandrova (2017: 164), and Cartwright (2020a: 279) take poverty to be a thick concept. More representatively, an array of researchers of poverty are at peace that poverty is a thick

For instance, many researchers view the choices of the approach and the poverty line as involving normative judgments. However, both philosophers of science and social scientists often fall short of providing arguments in favor of the adequacy of contextual values in poverty measurement. There is also a lack of debate on how contextual values can be compatible with epistemic values in poverty research.

Peter Townsend is an exception in this regard, as he thought through how contextual values in poverty research could affect its objectivity. While he did not deploy these terms, Townsend explicitly advocated for prioritizing epistemic values over contextual values in the science of poverty. Indeed, this preference is closely linked to his understanding of objectivity and his pursuit of an objective measure and theory of poverty. Let us see how.

ii. From social science to policy: Townsend and the value-free ideal

This thesis focuses on the approach in poverty measurement developed by Peter Townsend (1928-2009). Let us situate Townsend's approach within the tradition to which he belongs, that is, the tradition of empiricist British research on poverty and the living conditions of people. Beginning at the end of the 18th century, this tradition developed the first social surveys research (hereinafter, survey) with the explicit goals of establishing the actual social conditions of the people and making the state of these conditions circulate in the public arena. In this way, researchers aimed to achieve another goal: promoting a range of social reforms, including the adoption of universal health systems and specific improvements in housing and labor legislation. In a moment, we shall see that Townsend was part of a faction of this movement that aimed at progressive yet profound transformations, with the ultimate goal of supplanting capitalism with socialism. Before, let me refer to a turning point of this empiricist tradition: Seebohm Rowntree's research on poverty in the city of York at the start of the 20th century.

Rowntree aimed to resolve the public controversies at that time over the real extent of poverty. For this, he developed a new conception of poverty: the lack of minimum resources necessary to maintain *subsistence*, that is, minimum physical efficiency. He also settled this minimum by searching for a minimum caloric intake necessary for physical efficiency based on

concept. This is the case of Orshansky (1969: 37); Spicker (2006); Alkire *et al.* (2015: ch. 6); Ravallion (2016: 125); Atkinson (2019: ch. 10); Lister (2021: fig. 0.2); and Medeiros (2023: 9-11; 51-53; 133-139).

nutritional studies from the late 19th century. He then determined a minimum budget necessary to buy the cheapest foods with the necessary calories. Later in the 1930s, Rowntree conducted a new study in York and began to adopt a new measure of poverty. In addition to caloric needs, this measure also included enough income to also cover "minimum, yet conventional" items, such as food, housing, and social expenses (like newspapers, radios, beer, and gifts for family members).

It is natural to ask two things: what is the criterion for selecting these foods and the "minimum but conventional" items? What forms the basis for favoring nutritional studies to determine the minimum level of food intake? The first problem is called the "*selection of items*." The second problem of delegating to nutritionists the task of setting the threshold is a manifestation of another important question, namely, how we should establish what is called a "*minimum threshold*." This threshold is often interpreted as the point at which we should draw the poverty line. Rowntree's poverty line of the 1930s inspired the development of significant administrative poverty lines, such as the Official Poverty Line of the United States (US), and the official criteria for combating poverty in what would later become the British post-war Welfare State, the Supplementary Benefit. Indeed, Townsend's relative deprivation approach was consciously developed as an alternative to Rowntree's subsistence approach. But allow me a brief detour to consider Peter Townsend, the person.

Townsend was a prominent professor of sociology and social policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), Emeritus Professor at the University of Bristol, and a co-founder of the University of Essex.[12] His research spanned the features and causes of poverty, health inequalities, as well as contributions to disciplines like gerontology and social policy.[13] An active political advocate, Townsend was involved in the Labour Party's socialist faction and

[12] The LSE (n.d.) regards Townsend, together with Richard Titmuss and Abel-Smith, as one of the three pioneering figures of the institution who made significant contributions to research and policy on the elderly, healthcare, law, poverty, and welfare in the 20th century. We will talk more about Abel-Smith later. On Titmuss, see note 17 in ***Chapter 2*** and note 3 in ***Chapter 3***. The LSE has also commissioned Chris Renwick to write a biography of Townsend (LSE, n.d.).

[13] For the complete list of publications by Peter Townsend, refer to the bibliography hosted online by the University of Bristol (n.d.). A compilation of passages from some of his main texts is found in *The Peter Townsend Reader*, edited by Walker *et al.* (2011). Short bios of his personal and academic life were written by Peter Glennerster for *The British Academy* (Glennerster, 2011) and by Sinfield *et al.* (2011: ch. 1). Renwick (2023) provides an account of the initial phase of Townsend's research, highlighting the significant – but unrecognized – influence and contribution of his then-wife, Ruth Townsend, on his work. His obituaries in *The Guardian* (2009) and *The Independent* (2009) are also worth reading.

played a key role in establishing advocacy charities such as the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) and the Disability Alliance. He inspired and influenced an array of social scientists, like the British economist Anthony Barnes Atkinson, who pursued the study of economics because of Townsend's work (Atkinson, 2019: 1). The Mexican economist Julio Boltvinik even hailed Townsend as "the most important poverty researcher ever known" for combining an innovative conception and measure of poverty, with the design and conduction of surveys and empirical analysis (Boltvinik, 2011: 23; 23n1).

Townsend was a member and once president (1965-1966) of the Fabian Society. Founded in 1884, the Society included notable members such as Beatrice and Sidney Webb, founders of the LSE and it played a significant role in shaping the post-war British welfare state. Townsend's membership reflected the core mission of the Fabians: to promote the principles of social democracy and democratic socialism through gradualist and reformist efforts – for which the products of social science were considered essential.

His research significantly contributed to the "rediscovery" of poverty in Europe during the 1960s, challenging the widely accepted notion that economic growth and post-war welfare policies had nearly eradicated poverty in the UK. Despite the impact of his research in the academic literature, however, we should note that his prescriptions for radically expanding the British Welfare State were published just months after the 1979 general elections, when Margaret Thatcher took office. From that point on, the British system of social assistance mainly underwent retrenchment.

His radical prescriptions are found at the end of his *Poverty in the United Kingdom: A Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living* (henceforth, PITUK).[14] I have mentioned that Townsend argues that poverty should be regarded as relative deprivation caused by lack of resources and measured as such. To start spelling out his conception, let us read a famous passage from PITUK – indeed, the passage is part of its opening paragraph:

> Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged, or approved,

[14] The complete text of PITUK is accessible online for free. See this thesis' ***Appendix: Full Text Access*** for the full URL link to the book.

> in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities. (Townsend, 1979: 31)

Four distinct though deeply related elements are at stake in this passage. First, *relative deprivation*: this is deprivation from the *standard of living* of a society, that is, from the activities and living conditions that are customary. Second, *resources*: these are the means through which one can participate in the standard of living of a society. Third, *poverty*: which is a particular form of relative deprivation. Not all relative deprivation is caused by a lack of resources, as people may choose not to participate in various elements of the standard of living of their society. Poverty is relative deprivation with a specific cause, that is, lack of resources. The last element is a *point of disproportion*: this is a level in the resource scale at which relative deprivation increases disproportionately. For Townsend, an adequate measure of poverty is one that operationalizes all these notions. In this thesis, I call such a measure the "*cut-off measure*."

The main goal of this thesis is to claim that his theory of poverty *– of which his conception and measure are just a few elements – was first and foremost driven by the* value-free ideal. Developing a theory and a measure of poverty that adhere strictly to this ideal was "Townsend's Holy Grail."[15]

Why did Townsend pursue this ideal in the first place? For a variety of reasons, some of which we have already touched upon and that were put forward by important critics of contextual values in science. For him, contextual values help to produce and sustain bias and misperceptions about poverty. Townsend claims that these values, and the beliefs they influence, reflect and serve both cultural and power dynamics. These dynamics shape societal norms and reinforce expectations employed by social elites to manage and mitigate the potentially disruptive effects of inequality, one of which poverty is. This relationship between a society's contextual values, beliefs, culture, and power ultimately serves as a tool of the elites for control social order and is encapsulated by what some might call "*ideology*." It is not a coincidence that Townsend regarded himself as part of a tradition of social theorists inspired by Karl Marx. This tradition not only

[15] I am here referring to the title of David Piachaud's (1993 [1981]) famous review of PITUK, called "Peter Townsend and the Holy Grail." Piachaud intended to convey the elusive nature of the quest for a poverty line untouched by contextual values and argue that, despite Herculean efforts, Townsend had not found it.

stresses the role of ideology in maintaining the status quo but regards a scientist's pursuit of the value-free ideal as part of a struggle to escape from it and in this way advance social change.[16]

This is deeply related to how Townsend conceived objectivity. In PITUK, he repeatedly employs the term "objectivity" and underscores the necessity of developing a measure and theory of poverty that is "objective."[17] But what exactly is objectivity, after all? What makes a measure objective? In recent decades, the philosophy of science has extensively debated the nature and implications of scientific objectivity, with several conceptions being proposed. However, my goal in this thesis is not to argue for the adequacy of any of these but rather to discuss Townsend's conception of objectivity.[18]

While Townsend did not explicitly define his own use of the term, reading PITUK suggests he leaned towards viewing objectivity as *the satisfaction of epistemic values*: an objective measure and theory of poverty is one that satisfies these epistemic values the most. And this is where the value-free ideal comes in. For him, contextual values jeopardize objectivity. In fact, Townsend sees contextual values as the primary source of issues in approaches like Rowntree's, where values such as meritocracy and the work ethic negatively impact individual and conventional opinions on pivotal questions like: What do working-class people really need? What is the source of their deprivation? How do they behave? Or, more broadly, should poverty be considered not only in relation to the conditions of the poor but also those of the entire society?

---

[16] One could dispute the interpretation that Marx pursued the value-free ideal. Yet, I believe such disagreement would not detract from my argument. I do not seek to vindicate an interpretation of Marx's views here. Instead, my aim is to reference what appears to be a popular *interpretation* of his views on the role of contextual values in social sciences and his perspective on scientific inquiry (*e.g.*, Leiter, 2015; Badiei, 2022). According to this interpretation, Marx did not endorse the notion of purely neutral theory. However, he did aim for an analysis based on the broadest or most inclusive social viewpoint, namely, that of the proletariat. In this way, the interpretation goes, his stance is not predicated on contextual values but instead is a methodological choice designed to embrace the most comprehensive perspective possible. Indeed, Marx's methodology is often characterized by a deliberate shift away from debates over contextual values, which he perceived as either a diversion of intellectual effort or, at worst, an ideological sleight of hand. Put another way, the most scientifically rigorous analysis of capitalism would naturally align with the interests of the working class, not due to any ideological bias but as a methodological outcome of analyzing the social structure. One way to reconcile Townsend's quest for value-freedom in social science with his apparently normative strive for providing policy prescriptions might be interpreted in a similar manner. This discussion will be expanded upon in ***Section 3.1.1.d*** and ***Conclusion, ii***. I owe this articulation of this Marx's interpretation mainly to Rogério Lopes.

[17] A non-exhaustive list of these occurrences in PITUK includes pages 46, 48, 49, 51, 60, 83, 86, 98, 237, 247, 248, 282, 369, 370, 914, and 915.

[18] Reiss and Sprenger (2020) is a good introduction to the philosophical literature on scientific objectivity.

An objective theory of poverty should address these questions in a manner that aligns with epistemic values. For Townsend, an approach like Rowntree's, which looks only to physiological needs, ignores a range of human behavior that is evidence for how the need for participating in one's society is as important as physiological needs. Hence, we might say that the subsistence approach lacks the epistemic value of comprehensiveness. Also, the method Rowntree used to select budget items and draw the poverty line was not subject to external criteria, by which Townsend means that it lacks testability and unification. It lacks unification as it overlooks the role of resource distribution in causing poverty, thus failing to establish a link between poverty and broader social inequality – a link that Townsend's theory seeks to establish. Moreover, he argued that testability can be achieved through the hypothesis on the point of disproportion between resources and relative deprivation. In that sense, and contrary to Rowntree's measures, the cut-off measure would be based on a testable hypothesis.

This relates to how Townsend situates his conception and measure of poverty in comparison to other approaches. It is reasonable to claim that he takes a *monist* stance where there exists a concept and measurement of poverty superior to all others, with his own being the one. However, as we shall see, he did not regard the cut-off measure introduced in PITUK as the ultimate measure of poverty, since he believed the adequate operationalization of his conception may be yet to be achieved.[19]

iii. Objectives of the thesis

*As mentioned earlier, the main objective of this thesis is to show how Peter Townsend's theory of poverty is best understood in light of his pursuit of the value-free ideal. Townsend pursued this ideal because he took contextual values as the main source of biased measures, theories, and policies on poverty. To do so, he developed a theory of poverty that was, to the greatest extent possible, guided by epistemic values only. In practice, this translated into developing a theory that intended to be non-*ad hoc*, that is,* systematic*. In this thesis, I develop this argument from the standpoint of the* philosophy of measurement *and the* philosophy of science.

[19] This monist interpretation is reinforced by the assertions of some adherents to Townsend's "scientific" approach. This is the case of Héctor Nájera and David Gordon (2020), who claim that only a conception and measure of poverty that satisfy epistemic values can surpass the many challenges poverty measurement still faces.

Townsend tried to avoid what he regarded as the *arbitrary* and *ad-hoc* character of different conceptions and measures of poverty. I argue that he aimed at doing so through developing a scientific theory of poverty that is *systematic*. By systematic theory, I mean three things. First, his theory is systematic in the sense that Paul Hoyningen-Huene (2013) claims that scientific theories are systematic. According to Hoyningen-Huene, the authority of scientific theories derives from their *greater* systematicity than other forms of knowledge, like religion or astrology. For example, theories like the theory of relativity in physics are not subject to (much) public debate. Hoyningen-Huene argues that this is because they are more systematic than alternative forms of knowledge also related to the nature of the physical world. Furthermore, he argues that this greater systematicity translates into these theories performing better along nine *dimensions*: descriptions; explanations; predictions; the defense of knowledge claims; critical discourse; epistemic connectedness; an ideal of completeness (or of unification); knowledge generation; and the representation of knowledge. In this thesis, I propose that Townsend saw the fulfillment of epistemic values as a means to enhance a theory's performance across some of these dimensions. Therefore, his pursuit of epistemic values can be seen as an endeavor to construct a *systematic theory of poverty*, one that rectifies the lack of systematicity commonly found both in ordinary views and popular theories of the phenomenon.

I draw the second sense of systematicity from philosophy of measurement. This sense relates to my claim that the cut-off measure is part of a *middle-range theory* of poverty. Middle-range theories restrict themselves to a more limited set of phenomena, and act as a bridge between data and *broad-range theories*, that is, those theories that intend to explain a much broader set of phenomena. Middle-range theories are systematic because this bridging function promotes unification, which is one of the dimensions of systematicity. I argue that Townsend's theory of poverty is systematic in this sense because it links broad-range theories of social stratification with empirical data – the cut-off measure being the primary tool for establishing this connection.

Moreover, Townsend's measure exemplifies systematicity in its design, as it was crafted to be non-arbitrary and non-*ad hoc*. The measurement theory proposed by Norman Bradburn, Nancy Cartwright, and Jonathan Fuller (Bradburn *et al.,* 2017) illustrates how measures can embody these qualities. The theory states that a good measure comprises three elements: a conceptualization, an adequate representation of the conception, and procedures to collect the

relevant data. Also, in a good measure, solid arguments not only substantiate each element but also show that there is a correct relationship between them. In this way, the measure exhibits improved performance in the dimensions of defending knowledge claims and epistemic connectedness. Drawing from the initials of the three elements of a good measure, I call this theory "CRP."

At the core of Townsend's theory of poverty, we find this: A precisification of the concept of poverty, namely, a conception of poverty – relative deprivation caused by lack of resources. We also find anthropological observations and hypotheses about the elements of the conception that work as reasons in favor of this precisification. The conception in turn motivates his representation – the cut-off measure – and the procedures to gather the relevant data – which are reunited in the survey on the standard of living and resources of the British population. The theory is complemented by an explanation of poverty that lays out its causes, which helps it perform well in the dimension of explanation.

All these elements consist in the core of a middle-range theory of poverty, as it stays in between a broader theoretical framework of social stratification and the relevant empirical quantitative data, provided mainly by the PITUK survey.[20] As such, it aimed to satisfy epistemic goals like enabling unification with a broad-range theory of social inequality. For Townsend, inequality of resources is the dominant kind of inequality, and the best broad-range theory is a class-based one that explains how different kinds of resources are distributed through different systems. In a nutshell, Townsend's is a *systematic middle-range theory of poverty*.

How does this relate to Townsend's pursuit of the value-free ideal? I think we can interpret Townsend's strategy as one of devising a systematic theory of poverty to avoid the negative impact of contextual values in its measurement. Thus, through his pursuit of systematicity, he sought to address the deficiencies present in the approaches of those like Rowntree.

In this thesis, I also present and discuss objections raised against Townsend's theory. A primary concern is the status of the point of disproportion hypothesis. Given the tentative nature of PITUK's findings, it remains just that – a hypothesis. Furthermore, Townsend's commitment to value-freedom has attracted considerable scrutiny. First, his selection of the standard of living as poverty's deprivation space could invite criticism for potentially being influenced by contextual

[20] For now, I am setting aside what Townsend considers to be the "policy prescriptions" of the theory. These will be discussed in this thesis' ***Conclusion***.

values. Second, the indicators selected to measure relative deprivation have faced criticism for their apparent subjectivity, perceived as stemming from Townsend's personal biases. Lastly, the claim that his theory provides policy prescriptions might seem ultimately incompatible with his stated goal of maintaining value-freedom in the development of a theory and measure of poverty.

Do these issues imply that we should completely discard the theory? My thesis answers this question in the negative, and it does so in two distinct senses. In the first sense, I am making a *descriptive* claim, namely, I am providing an interpretation of Townsend's theory that argues for its systematicity. As such, when interpreting the theory, we should consider not only the cut-off measure but also all the other elements. In the second sense, I will make a (modest) *evaluative* claim. In the end of the thesis, I will vindicate a positive and distinctive quality of his theory of poverty. I argue that his pursuit of realizing epistemic values proved *fruitful*, as it inspired the development of various and in a way contrasting research programs. Despite its eventual flaws, Townsend's commitment to value-freedom has proven to be, so to speak, worthwhile.

***

Let us summarize the key points addressed earlier. At a meta-theoretical level, this thesis uses Townsend's theory of poverty – that is, mainly his conception, measure, and explanation of it – as a case study to address the question: should we prioritize epistemic over contextual values in poverty measurement? At a lower level, the thesis argues that Townsend's pursuit of the value-free ideal translated into the construction of a systematic middle-range theory of poverty.

iv. Limitations and strategy of the thesis

Before beginning, it is essential to clarify three important points. The first concerns the fact that this thesis does not cover certain key aspects of Townsend's theory. The second pertains to the strategy adopted, wherein I maintain a reserved stance regarding the quality of Townsend's theory and have not sought to resolve the range of issues regarding poverty measurement that he aimed to address. The third point relates to the interdisciplinary nature of this study.

Even though I have tried to present and interpret Townsend's theory from a broad and inclusive perspective, it must be noted that four significant aspects of his work are not discussed in sufficient detail here. First, in "Chapter 8: The Impact of Poverty" of PITUK, we find qualitative accounts of what Townsend describes as a "descriptive summary of the kind of conditions in which

individual poor families lived" (Townsend, 1979: 304). With these narratives, he tried to convince readers skeptical of his survey's findings, as well as make his research "acknowledge the complications and inconsistencies of individual and social life" (1979: 304). Second, I also do not discuss Townsend's commentaries and choices regarding how he dealt with the challenge of equating household incomes across different sizes and compositions. This is an essential step for accurately capturing an individual's standards of living, one that is often achieved through the use of "equivalence scales" (1979: 262-267).[21] Third, Townsend contended that, contrary to widespread beliefs, the poor are not a fixed group of people but instead experience shifts in poverty status due to life events, such as changes in employment, health issues, or variations in family dependency. He highlighted the importance of distinguishing between short-term and long-term poverty, noting that a significantly larger portion of the population falls into poverty at some point in their lives (1979: 302). Households transition in and out of poverty influenced by factors like employment status, dependency ratios, housing costs, asset values, and the effects of aging, all of which collectively impact the likelihood of poverty (1979: 916). Fourth, an important part of Townsend's theory involves investigating the population's beliefs about the phenomenon. For example, his survey found that the most common conception of poverty among the population aligns with the subsistence approach. As I have mentioned, Townsend critically assessed these prevailing beliefs about poverty, claiming that they do not define poverty or its characteristics; but he also thought that a complete theory of poverty should address these beliefs, as they help us explain it. Here, I will briefly mention some of these, especially in how they relate with his cut-off measure.

Secondly, I have some remarks regarding the strategy I undertook in this thesis. Assessing the methodological quality of Townsend's survey and the empirical robustness of his test results was beyond my capabilities. While acknowledged, these aspects are not critically evaluated. This is why I place the term "findings" in quotation marks to indicate the tentative nature of his conclusions.[22]

Furthermore, I clarify that I do not provide definitive answers to the array of fundamental questions Townsend sought to address. I am referring to questions such as: Is poverty absolute or

[21] However, see note 23 in ***Chapter 1***.
[22] A study attempting to replicate one of Townsend's findings is referenced in note 35 of ***Chapter 1***.

relative? What constitutes poverty's deprivation space? How should subjective judgments be considered in its measurement? More pertinent to the objectives of this thesis: Can and should poverty measurement be free from contextual values? Was Townsend's pursuit of value-freedom consistent after all? Thoroughly addressing these questions would surpass the limitations of this study, and to be honest I lack responses to them. This is why I offer the reader only some hypotheses to be further explored. *Therefore, all the responses to these questions presented below should be viewed not as my conclusions but as fair reconstructions of the predominant views in the literature and, more importantly, of Townsend's own stance.* As mentioned earlier, I will reserve the only evaluative stance I make for the end of the thesis (***Conclusion, iii***). I acknowledge that this has both advantages and disadvantages: it may result in a lighter argumentative load; yet it also risks disappointing those readers in search of answers to the very questions that inspired Townsend to formulate his theory.

Finally, the complexity of poverty naturally leads to its study across various disciplines. Indeed, this thesis can be aptly described as interdisciplinary, reflecting my effort to engage with diverse fields that have theorized about and tried to measure poverty. Interdisciplinary work also comes with its own set of advantages and disadvantages. The advantage lies in the potential to engage scholars from diverse disciplines, such as economics, sociology, social policy, and, more recently, philosophy. On the other hand, there is the inherent risk of addressing the multitude of issues involved only superficially. Nonetheless, here I have consciously chosen breadth over depth, with the intention of exploring a broader spectrum of issues within the constrained framework of a master's thesis.

No doubt, whether my strategy of abstaining from providing answers and opting for breadth over depth has been effective is a judgment I leave for the reader to make.

v. Chapters' outline

My interpretation and analysis of Townsend's pursuit of the value-free ideal proceed in two stages: a larger *descriptive stage*, which sets the context of the scientific measurement of poverty and shows the systematic nature of his theory of poverty; followed by a shorter *evaluative stage*, in which I offer a limited though positive evaluation of Townsend's pursuit of the ideal.

Chapter 1 provides the broader context into which Townsend's theory should be placed. This will consist of presenting solutions to the challenge of how to set the poverty line and presenting the main approaches in poverty measurement: monetary; subsistence; basic needs; relative deprivation; capabilities; and human rights. The development of these approaches, along with techniques to determine the poverty line, stemmed from two needs. First, there was the need for more systematic criteria to determine the extent of poverty in a society. Second, there is the need to determine the sections of the population entitled to social assistance in a less arbitrary manner. How to determine the extent and the entitlement questions were and still are highly politicized matters, heavily influenced by contextual values and conventional or officially held views. It is in that context that Townsend emerges as the foremost advocate for researching poverty while actively striving to avoid both the leverage of these values and the societal beliefs influenced by them. I think that in this respect, Townsend is a distinct pursuer of the value-free ideal.

Then, ***Chapter 2*** develops out a claim by the British sociologist Thomas H. Marshall about Townsend's theory of poverty. T. H. Marshall argued that Townsend's theory is better understood as a system. At the core of this system lies his conception of poverty as relative deprivation. Significant though this conception and the associated cut-off measure certainly are, they form part of a set of scientific products, and thus should ultimately be judged together with them. I draw the idea that Townsend's theory of poverty is systematic from this claim by T. H. Marshall and elaborate on it by asserting that the theory is systematic in three ways: following Hoyningen-Huene's criteria; functioning as a middle-range theory; and aligning with CRP measurement theory. Doing so will allow me to show in the following chapters how the elements of Townsend's theory were developed to honor epistemic values.

Chapter 3 delves into the foundational element of the theory: Townsend's conception of poverty. Poverty is relative deprivation caused by lack of resources. This conception has two elements: relative deprivation – that is, deprivation from a society's standard of living – and resources. I will make each element more precise and amidst this discuss the objection that this conceptualization, while purportedly guided by the value-free ideal, may actually be influenced by contextual values. Later, it will present and discuss the hypotheses and anthropological observations that aim to support the conceptualization. The hypotheses concern relationships among these two elements, together with how they relate with other phenomena. The

anthropological observations aim to motivate the conception of poverty and explain the relationships to which some of the hypotheses refer to.

Chapter 4 examines the representational and procedural dimensions of Townsend's middle-range theory of poverty. Within PITUK, Townsend deploys four distinct measures of poverty: the state measure; the relative income measure; the relative deprivation measure; and the cut-off measure. Interestingly, only the latter two are "objective" for him. Further, we will explore how Townsend develops the pivotal cut-off measure. This involves constructing two indexes – one for total resources and another for relative deprivation – followed by a series of procedures designed to test the point of disproportion hypothesis.

In ***Chapter 5***, we discuss Townsend's explanation of poverty, that is, what are its causes. Roughly speaking, poverty stems from the distribution of resources and the dynamics of standards of living. We shall see in what senses the causes of poverty are structural and that command over resources is *the* most important explanatory factor in the theory. The primary mediator between resources and individuals is social class, but social institutions and what Townsend refers to as "social minorities" also play an additional and important role in explaining poverty. Resource inequalities give rise to disparities in styles of life, but in contemporary societies, a national standard of living emerges and it is this standard that determines relative deprivation. All these aspects of the explanation make up a middle-range theory of poverty that connects the distinctive features of poverty with a broad-range and reformed Marxist theory about social inequality.

The ***Conclusion*** begins with a summary of the previous chapters and closes the main argument of the thesis, by showing how the systematic nature of the theory relates to Townsend's pursuit of the value-free ideal. Next, I will discuss (though not assess) the objection that his pursuit of the ideal conflict with the last element of the theory, namely, its "policy prescriptions." I finish with a modest evaluative claim about the theory. Despite its potential shortcomings, it fulfills an important epistemic value: *fruitfulness*. Townsend's approach and theory of poverty have spurred the conduct of more comprehensive surveys on poverty and deprivation. Moreover, they have also led to the development of different research programs on poverty measurement, each conceptualizing and measuring poverty in different ways, as we shall see.

CHAPTER 1
A Map of Poverty Measurement

Introduction

Understanding the scientific development of poverty measurement goes beyond mere scientific curiosity. Knowing about it is key in understanding the critical choices involved in designing a poverty measure. For their importance in Townsend's theory and measure of poverty, two of these choices stand out: determining where to set the *poverty line* and choosing the appropriate *approach* in poverty measurement.

It can be argued that historically the development of methods to draw the poverty line has been driven by two forces. First, due to a growing moral concern regarding widespread poverty in industrial societies, such as 19th-century Britain, and the highly moralized and politicized controversies over both the *extent* of poverty and the criteria for *eligibility* in poverty-related policies. Second, by an effort to answer the extent and eligibility questions in accordance with *appropriate scientific standards*. Considering this, it is almost natural that some researchers consider the influence of morality and politics (and other contextual factors) in defining poverty to be unavoidable. But Townsend takes a different stance. We shall see that his criticism of notable poverty measures primarily hinges on his belief that contextual values (and the social beliefs influenced by them) are in conflict with appropriate scientific standards.

My notion of approaches in poverty measurement is based on Amartya Sen's (1981; 2017: ch. A3) considerations of what he called the "informational basis" of our judgments of social states. Choosing an approach in designing a measure of poverty consists in determining two related types of information. First, poverty's *space of deprivation* or *basal space*, that is, the thing or things that people in poverty lack. Second, what *indicator* to capture this basal space. Among the most important approaches, we have: monetary approach; subsistence approach; relative deprivation approach; basic needs approach; capabilities approach; and human rights approach. In fact, as we will delve into each approach, what we will find is a dialectic of new approaches, each explicitly emerging as alternatives to their predecessors. An important stage in the dialectic was the debate between Townsend's relative deprivation approach and Amartya Sen's capabilities approach. We

shall see how this debate highlights key philosophical and methodological differences in how to understand and measure poverty.

Before we begin, it is worth remembering the descriptive focus of the main part of this thesis. The positions presented in this ***Chapter 1*** should not be seen as my personal views but as fair reconstructions of notable positions found in the literature regarding the political importance of establishing the poverty line and the main approaches to measuring poverty. ***Chapters 2***, ***3***, ***4***, and ***5*** present a systematic proposal to answer them, to wit, Townsend's theory. I reserve my evaluative remarks solely for the end of the thesis (***Conclusion, iii***).

***

Sections' outline

We start in ***Section 1.1*** presenting and discussing the notion of the poverty line. In ***Section 1.2***, I discuss the notion of approaches in poverty measurement. ***Section 1.3*** presents six of the most important approaches. We end the chapter in ***Section 1.4***, where I compare the approaches, focusing on the similarities and differences between Townsend's favorite approach and Sen's favorite approach.

1.1. The search for Townsend's Holy Grail: the poverty line

The objective of this section is first to present the notion of a poverty line. Furthermore, the section also places this notion in the broader context of those efforts of setting the line in what Townsend and other poverty researchers call a "non-arbitrary" way.

Efforts to measure poverty have been surrounded by controversy since their inception.[1] The first pivotal moment in this history was the scientific development of qualitative and, above all, quantitative research to measure poverty that occurred in Britain at the end of the 19th century.[2]

---

[1] In Britain, the relationship between statistical measurement of social states like poverty and political controversy dates back even before the 19th Century. Sen notes that in the 17th Century, the Oxford Professor, William Petty, proposed a national income estimate of England at that time to King Charles II. Petty did it in order "'to show' that 'the King's subjects are not in so bad a condition as discontented Men would make them'" (Sen, 1987: 20-21).

[2] European policy for dealing with poverty – like the English Poor Laws – dates back from the 14th century and the first quantitative work about poverty dates back from the late 18th century. However, all these barely resemble today's standards. For a more comprehensive history of the ideas, science, and policy of poverty, see *The Economics of Poverty: History, Measurement, and Policy* (Ravallion, 2016: chs. 1, 2, 3, and 4), from the Australian economist and previously director of the research department at the World Bank Martin Ravallion.

Actually, reflection, proposals, and policies about poverty are much older than Modernity. Ravallion (2016: 4-5; 28-30) cites policies and proposals to deal with it in Pericles in Athens around the 5th century BCE. Beyond the West,

Here, the seminal works are those of the industrialists and social reformers Charles Booth (1840-1916) and above all Seebohm Rowntree (1871-1954). Both their studies of poverty, respectively in London and York, were at least in part motivated by polemical debates about the real extent of poverty in late 19th England.[3] These were debates sparked by differences between poverty according to the official standards at that time – standards that determined who could be part of poverty alleviation policies – and poverty as perceived by certain social movements. These movements claimed that these official standards covered only a small portion of a much larger number of the truly poor. Booth's and Rowntree's hope was that measuring poverty in a non-arbitrary way could help to end these political controversies. To accomplish this, the two needed a tool that could better separate those in poverty from those that are not. This tool was the poverty line.

To start with, we will understand the poverty line as the level of income under which individuals are considered poor and above which they are not.[4] In the next sections we shall see that there are objects other than income that can also define a poverty threshold.

Since then, setting the poverty line is among the main polemics in poverty measurement – if it is not the *main* polemic. Beyond a criterion to determine how poor Britain actually were, the line could also provide a more robust criterion than previously adopted to identify those eligible for policies aimed at assisting the poor. Such criterion would be in contrast with the old methods of the English Poor Laws for granting poverty relief, to wit, "visual verification" and "self-targeting."[5] These methods would be regarded as increasingly inadequate for meeting the political

---

Ravallion continues, in the 4th century BCE, the Confucian scholar Xunzi thought that the main motivation for fighting poverty was to guarantee social and political stability. And during the 3rd century BCE, the Indian philosopher and statesman Chanakya (also called "Kautilya") proposed in the *Arthashastra*, his political and economics treatise, interventions to the emperor to deal with famine.

[3] The first of seventeen volumes, Booth's *Life and Labour of the People* was published in 1889 about the lives of the working class in London. The first edition of Rowntree's *Poverty, A study of town life*, a study of deprived people in York, was published in 1901. A good and critical presentation of their methodologies and social context is Laderchi (2000). For more systematic – and sympathetic – accounts of Booth's methodology, see Spicker (1990); for Rowntree, see Veit-Wilson (1986).

[4] The "received wisdom" is to say that Booth invented the poverty line and Rowntree perfected it. However, Alan Gillie (1996) presents evidence that Booth adopted the line of poverty from the London School Board's criteria of eligibility for the remission of school fees. In that sense, Booth adopted an administrative criterion to settle the line, which would be another evidence that, as Townsend emphasized, the influence of social and political beliefs in poverty measurement is much more widespread than it is often recognized.

[5] I refer the reader to Paul Slack's (1995), a *locus classicus* about the history of pre-industrial English Poor Law (1531-1782).

demands of that period. In this vein, Eric Hobsbawm (1968: 400-401) argued that inquiry about poverty like those of Booth and Rowntree was a result of the decline of economic liberalism, the emergence of socialist organizations and the newly electoral relevance of the poor. Then, as the actual needs of people in poverty began to figure out in public policy, the necessity for more structured measures and policy granting criteria only grew.

Anthony Atkinson (1987: 750-751) remarks that Booth's and Rowntree's seminal works were followed by the works of the statistician and economist Arthur Bowley. In 1915, Bowley, along with Burnett-Hurst, published a study on the incidence of poverty in the British cities of Northampton, Reading, Stanley, and Warrington. A decade later, Bowley conducted a follow-up study in those same cities to assess any changes during that period.[6] Atkinson notes that Bowley was aware of how unlikely it was that even rigorous scientific work could end with controversies. The following episode vividly illustrates this point:

> … [Bowley] referred to his poverty line as "arbitrary, but intelligible" (1925, p. 14), recognizing that others might disagree, as illustrated by the famous occasion in 1920 when he was being cross-examined by Ernest Bevin, the well-known union leader (later Foreign Secretary) during the inquiry into dock workers' pay. Bowley had given evidence for the employers as to what constituted a minimum basket of goods. Bevin in turn had gone out and bought the recommended diet and came into court with a plate bearing a few scraps of bacon, fish, and bread. In a devastating piece of cross-examination, he asked Bowley whether he thought that this was sufficient breakfast for a man who had to carry heavy bags of grain all day. (Atkinson, 1987: 750-751)

The search for a *non-arbitrary poverty line* might be regarded as one of the main drivers of the scientific development of measures and theories of poverty. We have already seen two important objectives the line might help to achieve: To determine how much poverty there is in a population, that is, to determine the *incidence* of poverty; and providing a criterion for determining *eligibility* for poverty relief policies. Finding a non-arbitrary, "scientific" line (as well as a "scientific" theory of poverty) that could help answer both of these questions was "Peter Townsend's Holy Grail."[7] It is no coincidence that Townsend's proposed poverty line is often

---

[6] The first study was *Livelihood and Poverty* (Bowley & Burnett-Hurst, 1915) and the follow-up was *Has Poverty Diminished?* (Bowley & Burnett-Hurst, 1925). It is worth mentioning that these works by Bowley were pioneering in their use of statistical inference and the sampling of a random population in social research.

[7] About the origins of this phrase, see this thesis' ***Introduction, ii*** and note 15 in the same ***Introduction***.

taken as his main contribution to the literature on poverty. However, I hope to show that as important as it is, Townsend's preferred measure is just one element in a broader theoretical effort to describe and most broadly explain poverty in line with the value-free ideal.

Townsend thought that the most common official or widely shared poverty lines in countries like Britain or the US – including those used to set criteria for social assistance schemes – should be scientifically checked by comparing them to non-arbitrary poverty lines. By non-arbitrary, Townsend mainly refers to something like his conception of an objective line, namely, a line that has these properties: it is not the result of or influenced by contextual values (mainly political or moral judgments) or beliefs; it is not the result of the researcher's whim; and it reflects typical scientific criteria like the epistemic values of empirical adequacy or explanatory power. In fact, only by following these epistemic values we could arrive at a measure at maximum non-influenced by these beliefs, and hence non-arbitrary. Otherwise, the research results would be influenced by the misguided, partial, and distorted views enticed in a given society about poverty. Roughly speaking, Townsend's non-arbitrary line would be the result of his examination of the relationship between people's income and their relative deprivation. He proposed a hypothesis that there is a point in this relationship where people's deprivation from society's standard of living increases disproportionately compared to their income. This point would then provide a non-arbitrary level for setting the poverty line.

Townsend was looking for evidence on *discontinuities* between the features of people in poverty from those out of it. The Mexican economist Hector Nájera and the English sociologist David Gordon write that what is being assumed here is:

> the existence of two groups: the poor and not-poor. The scientific measurement of poverty therefore requires both a sound theory, stating how these groups should be identified and empirical scrutiny of the poverty line. Otherwise, the prevalence of poverty will be subject to arbitrary decisions and unscientific approaches that result in even more questionable rates of limited use for policy design and evaluation. (Nájera & Gordon: 2023)

However, it might be said that among poverty researchers, the existence of such discontinuity is far from being consensual. In the face of lack of evidence in this regard, it would seem that setting the line is necessarily a matter of arbitrary yet intelligible choice, as Bowley has claimed.

It is of some worth to compare this with the take of some economists dedicated to research poverty. For instance, the Brazilian economist Sergei Soares points out to what he takes as a mismatch of the concept of poverty with the concept of well-being:

> The concept of poverty is closely linked to the concept of well-being – poverty is a lack of material well-being. Well-being is nonetheless a *continuous concept*: an individual with R$ 11 acquires more material well-being than one with R$ 10, in the same way that one with R$ 1,001 can obtain more well-being than one with R$ 1,000. Poverty, on the other hand, is a *binary concept*: you are either poor or you are not; someone is above or below the line. (Soares, 2009: 44; my emphasis)

This view can be criticized in a variety of ways. First, Soares' account cannot be taken as representative of economics. After all, there are different ways to understand well-being (Alexandrova, 2017), even if we restrict ourselves to economics (Angner, 2015).[8] Furthermore, we can argue that Soares is simply wrong in how he understands the nature of the concept of poverty.[9] Lastly, one might even acknowledge poverty as a binary concept and well-being as a continuous variable, while maintaining that meaningful statistical relationships between these two types of variables can indeed be established. Important as they are, let us put aside these possible objections for a moment. For now, it suffices to say that when measuring poverty, economists typically look at people's economic resources, like their income or commodities, given that these resources would indicate their level of well-being. However, as the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences winner Angus Deaton claims, the issue is that:

> Many writers have expressed grave doubts about the idea that there is some discontinuity in the distribution of welfare, with poverty on one side and lack of it on the other, and certainly there is no empirical indicator – income, consumption, calories, or the consumption of individual commodities – where there is any perceptible break in the

[8] The philosophical and economics literature on well-being is huge and addressing it is outside the scope of this thesis. For a philosophical account of this concept from the viewpoint of philosophy of science, I refer the reader to Alexandrova (2017). It is worth noting that Alexandrova advocates for a pluralist and contextualist view, in which a variety of concepts appropriately referred to as "well- being" are accompanied by a variety of theories that, across different contexts, describe and explain the referent of these concepts (Alexandrova, 2017: chs. 1 and 2). In economics, Angner (2015) claims that well-being is conceptualized in three different ways: as the satisfaction of preferences; as the experience of positive mental states; or as the fulfillment of lists of positive states that are more or less independent of subjective states.

[9] For instance, the view of poverty as ultimately a discrete concept can be rejected by considering it a vague concept. Like other vague concepts, poverty could then be applied discretely in certain contexts, but not in others. This perspective closely mirrors Alexandrova's assertion about the scientific treatment of well-being (see note 8 in this ***Chapter 1***).

> distribution or in behavior that would provide an empirical basis for the construction of a poverty line. (Deaton, 2015: 141)

Here, somewhat like Townsend and contrary to Soares, Deaton is taking the putative continuous character of well-being not as a conceptual but an empirical question. In the absence of the discontinuity, the Holy Grail of a non-arbitrary, objective poverty line would be missing in economics' poverty research too.

In that scenario, where do we ultimately find ourselves? Soares claims that we end up with politics, or to put it differently, we should defer the determination of the poverty line to processes of political deliberation which, by their nature, are influenced by contextual values:

> Given that the poverty line is important for political reasons, if this work can arrive at any conclusion, it's that the poverty line should be politically determined. Just as economic science has much to say about the minimum wage but cannot specify an ideal value, I hope to have demonstrated that economists have much to discuss concerning the poverty line, but they cannot pinpoint a fair or ideal value. In the same way that the Congress determines the minimum wage through an open vote, ideally informed by the analyses of economists and other social scientists, I propose that the Congress should determine the value of the poverty line. (Soares, 2009: 45)

Of course, it may be the case that in our search for discontinuities, we are looking for the *wrong place*, that is, we are looking only for people's well-being. There may be other elements that people in poverty are deprived of and that are associated with empirical discontinuities. For instance, we may turn to nutritional studies to look for a level of caloric intake at which people start to have physiological malfunctioning. This level could tell us where to draw the poverty line. In fact, this is a somewhat crude description of Seebohm Rowntree's famous poverty line.

To understand Rowntree's poverty line, we need to look at his *approach* to poverty measurement. Doing so properly asks us to understand what I and other poverty researchers mean by this notion. This is what we will do next.

1.2. Approaches in poverty measurement

This section will present the notion of an approach in poverty measurement. Further, it will also illustrate it through a brief discussion of how the development of the science of poverty may be regarded as the development of different approaches. Here, I am inspired by Sen's conception

of approaches not only in poverty measurement but in different sorts of judgments about social states like inequality, standard of living, and development (Sen, 1981: 11-17; and mainly 2017: ch. A3). First, I will show that an approach in poverty measurement is made up of two elements: the *basal space* that animate the measure and its *indicators*. Second, I will discuss an important distinction between *indirect* and *direct* poverty measures. This will clarify many issues that I have previously discussed only in a loose manner.

I will follow a canonical way of schematically presenting contemporary history in the science of poverty.[10] Before starting, I must say that my presentation does not intend to be exhaustive. The reader might think that the historical development of approaches in poverty measurement may look too Whiggish. Which means, as an evolution from a minimalist and conservative view about poverty towards one that is more comprehensive about its nature and causes, and perhaps also more generous. While I do think that more recent approaches made important advancements in poverty measurement, my goal here is not to vindicate such a reading of the history in poverty measurement. What I want is to lay the groundwork for situating Townsend's work on poverty in a historical context.[11]

We have mentioned that the controversies around where to draw the poverty line motivated the first development of methodologies to measure poverty in a putatively scientific way. However, throughout the 20th century until now, this controversy was accompanied by more fundamental disputes concerning what poverty *is*. It is true that there is a consensus in the literature that poverty is a *lack* or *deprivation* of something. However, as the Brazilian economist and sociologist Marcelo Medeiros puts it, "the consensus on how to define it ends here" (2012: 153).[12]

---

[10] I am referring to the presentations of Townsend (1979: ch. 1; 1987b; 2006); Sen (1981: ch. 2); the Brazilian economist Sônia Rocha (2006: chs. 1 and 2); Anthony Atkinson (2019: chs. 1 and especially 2); and the introduction to *Dimensions of poverty* (2020) by the philosophers Valentin Beck and Henning Hahn, and the economist Robert Lepenies.

[11] In fact, many presentations of the history of the science of poverty have this Whiggish character, Ravallion being one of the more explicit (2016). For a critical view about this Whiggish view, see Misturelli and Heffernan (2010).

[12] Even here, however, things are not so simple as one may distinguish *lack* from *deprivation* to mark an important question about poverty: what its *cause* is. The question of whether poverty is caused by the improvidence or irresponsibility of those in poverty or is attributable to wider social factors has been an age-old issue entwined with the discussions surrounding political interventions around it. For instance, the English Poor Law of 1834 is notably known for its effort to separate the residuum of "involuntary" and "irremediable pauperism" from the rest, taken as "responsibility of the poor." Further, Slack shows that since the later Middle Ages there was a distinction between those poor "deserving" and "not deserving" relief (Slack, 1995: 5). Accordingly, for the poor not responsible for their poverty, it would be more fitting to characterize it as "deprivation." Conversely, for those that are held responsible, it

Moreover, especially in the context of the UK, many researchers explicitly distinguish poverty from deprivation. The rationale is that, given not all forms of deprivation constitute poverty, and given that it is difficult to settle the line separating the poor from the non-poor, it is better to drop out of the notion of poverty altogether (Wolff *et al.*, 2015: 26).[13] Nonetheless, talk not only about deprivation but about "poverty" has never ceased, suggesting that the concept of poverty plays a too important role in our understanding of people's and societies' conditions to be abandoned.

Approaches in poverty measurement help us to enhance our understanding of these conditions. In fact, approaches were mainly products of disputes about what kind of deprivation poverty is, and how can a measure capture this deprivation. Since the poverty line is an almost ubiquitous element in poverty measures, it cannot serve as a criterion to distinguish between different approaches. Thus, each approach in poverty measurement has two core elements:

(1) The measure's ***basal*** (or ***deprivation***) ***space***;

(2) The favorite ***indicator*** (or ***proxy***) to capture its basal space.

Element (1) basically precisify the *kind* of deprivation that poverty is, and element (2) how can we *capture* this deprivation. Since Rowntree, six major approaches to poverty measurement have been developed: monetary; subsistence; basic needs; relative deprivation; basic capabilities; and human rights. Each approach varies in their specific basal spaces and some in their specific indicators. Let us delve into each of these two elements in more detail now.

---

would be more appropriate to label their poverty as a simple "lack." In fact, there is evidence that language usage somewhat goes in that direction. For instance, the Merriam-Webster dictionary puts that "to lack of something" is "to stand in need of : suffer from the absence or deficiency of [something]" (2023a; my emphasis); whereas deprivation is "the state of being *kept* from possessing, enjoying, or using something" or "an *act* of withholding or taking something away from someone or something" (2023b; my emphasis). We shall see how both Rowntree's primary poverty and Townsend's poverty as relative deprivation incorporate in their own definition a specific cause for the deprivation that constitutes poverty.

[13] Wolff *et al.* are referring to the British philosopher Richard J. Hull that, in *Deprivation and Freedom: A Philosophical Enquiry* (2007), focuses only on relative deprivation because this would "both avoids the perceived contentiousness of invoking the term poverty and allows for situations where one could not be said to be poor but could be said to be deprived" (Hull, 2007: ch. 1). In fact, we shall see how many critics of Townsend's theory claimed that his main contributions were to the understanding not of poverty but of different deprivations (Piachaud, 1993 [1981]; Marshall, 1981).

1.2.1. Basal space

A basal space is the "thing" around which we assess a given state of affairs, like how someone is faring or how good or bad is some society. Here, the basal space determines what is the kind of deprivation that constitutes poverty, and this is what the poverty measure aims to capture. More precisely, the basal space determines the thing a person in poverty does not have, that is, the thing that she lacks or is deprived of. In the literature, , together with well-being, the most common poverty's basal space is resources, which is typically interpreted as being economic resources like income and wealth. Other popular poverty's basal spaces are: basic needs; relative deprivation; basic capabilities; and basic rights. We will see each one of them below.

We have mentioned above (***Introduction, i***) that most poverty researchers argue that choosing an approach in poverty measurement entails making a contextual judgment. In what follows, I will briefly discuss three ways in which the choice over poverty's basal space may involve such a judgment.[14] Further, I will conclude mentioning a fourth interpretation of the basal space, one that entirely rejects that choosing it is a contextual judgment. In fact, I believe this last interpretation aligns precisely with Townsend's interpretation of poverty's basal space.

a) Poverty's basal space is given by basal equality

Building on another formulation by Sen, the choice over the appropriate basal space for poverty may hinge on another choice, to wit, the decision regarding *basal equality*, also called the choice over the "*equalisandum*." In political philosophy, basal equality is the basic information of egalitarian distributive judgments. It "refers to the general class of variables to which the assessment of justice is sensitive under that theory, and (no less importantly) excludes other variables" (Sen, 2017: 340). Beyond what basal equality includes, we have what it *excludes*. For instance, if we take basal equality to be well-being, our egalitarian distribution will look for utility (or other interpretations of well-being) while neglecting different types of information, such as that related to freedom.[15]

---

[14] I refer the reader to Wolff *et al.* (2015) for a thorough discussion of poverty's basal space as involving a contextual judgment from the perspective of political and applied philosophy.

[15] The literature on the basal space of equality is huge. It began with Sen (1980a) and gained its contemporary vocabulary with Cohen (1989). For an account that directly relates it to issues of poverty and inequality measurement, see Sen (1993: ch. 2; 2017: A3).

Even if we associate poverty's basal space with basal equality, our preferred poverty's basal space may not encompass or precisely align with all the solutions offered by political philosophy to the issue of basal equality. This is so because political philosophers often precisifies notions like resources and basic needs in ways that revise these concept's folk understandings, and even differ from their typical meanings in disciplines like economics or sociology. Consider the case of John Rawls (1971), who is taken by many as the main proponent of resource equality. In fact, the object of basal equality for Rawls is what he called "primary goods." These are goods desirable and useful for all human beings, like rights and liberties, opportunities, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect. It becomes evident that these primary goods encompass a broader range of things than what lay people and even economists typically refer to as "resources."[16] [17]

In any case, if we consider the decision regarding poverty's basal space to be coextensive to the decision regarding basal equality, then poverty involves a contextual judgment in the sense of being a question of distributive justice according to egalitarian principles. However, not all political philosophers are egalitarians. Accordingly, let us take a look at a non-egalitarian interpretation of poverty's basal space as being a matter of justice.

b) Poverty's basal space is a matter of justice, but not of equality

A second interpretation of taking poverty's basal space as involving a contextual judgment takes poverty as a matter of justice but denies its association with egalitarianism. This view is exemplified by the doctrine of *sufficientarianism*, which posits that distributive justice is concerned not with equality but with ensuring that people's living conditions surpass the threshold required for a decent or good enough quality of life. In that case, choosing poverty's basal space is not about identifying the basic information for egalitarian distributive judgments. Instead, it

[16] In fact, the distinction between a concept and its conceptions is well-recognized in political philosophy. Rawls himself mentions this distinction right at the beginning of *A Theory of Justice* (1971: 5-6).

[17] Another important difference is that an important candidate for basal equality is arguably not relevant for poverty measurement. A big strand in contemporary liberal egalitarianism emphasizes the role that opportunities should have in our distributive concerns. Some theorists like Gerald Cohen and Richard Arneson claim that basal equality should be a special kind of opportunity, *opportunity for welfare* or *well-being* (for a good review on this, see Arneson, 2013: section 3). While there has been much empirical work that tries to operationalize inequality of opportunity, few if any work at all design poverty measures based on opportunity for well-being.

revolves around determining the basic information for what we consider to be the *social minimum* that every member of society is entitled to.[18] Indeed, we will explore how a research program influenced by Townsend's theory, the consensual approach, interprets poverty's basal space as precisely determined by the contents of such a minimum (***Conclusion, iii***).

Nonetheless, it is possible to view poverty's basal space as involving a contextual judgment without deeming it a matter of justice – neither egalitarian nor sufficientarian. Let us see how.

c) Poverty's basal space is a matter of contextual judgment, but not of justice

There is a third interpretation of taking poverty's basal space as a matter of contextual values, but one that denies it is a matter of justice. This is the interpretation by philosopher Scott Wisor, who argues that the basal space of global poverty measures should be based on moral and political arguments that will not always coincide with debates about justice. So, poverty's basal space may diverge with basal equality and also with social minimum (Wisor, 2012: 99-100). In that case, poverty's basal space may be related to humanitarian considerations or moral judgments that are separate from issues of justice.

For instance, David Miller (2007) argues that poverty is a matter of justice solely within the context of national citizenship. He argues that the obligations citizens have towards one another do not extend to foreign nationals, positioning global poverty outside the purview of justice. While this stance does not rule out the possibility of cross-border assistance to alleviate global poverty, it entails that individuals in foreign countries that are in poverty would not be entitled – in the sense of having a claim or right – to such assistance.[19]

d) Poverty's basal space does not involve contextual judgments

Enough with the different interpretations of the basal space as a matter of moral or political philosophy. Now, I will just mention a perspective that stands in contrast to all three earlier ones. This interpretation fundamentally rejects the notion that poverty's basal space is a matter of

[18] Harry Frankfurt's (1987) is the foundational formulation of sufficientarianism. For an overview of the philosophical literature on the social minimum, see White (2021). It is worth checking a reconciliatory approach between sufficientarianism and egalitarianism in the conceptualization and measurement of poverty provided by Fragoso and Lemay (2024).

[19] For a thorough discussion of this issue, see Gaisbauer and Schweiger (2016: esp. part 1).

contextual judgments, and hence it is in accordance with the value-free ideal in poverty measurement. There are different ways to articulate this position, but it is crucial to acknowledge that such researchers represent a minority in the literature. And notably, Townsend was a key figure within this minority group. We will delve deeper into this viewpoint below (***Section 3.1.1.d*** and ***Conclusion, ii***).

However, merely identifying poverty's basal space is insufficient for its measurement or for determining an approach. The next critical step involves selecting the indicator for the chosen deprivation space. To this, we now turn our attention.

1.2.2. Indicator

An indicator is the other core informational basis of poverty measures. According to Earl Babbie's famous textbook on social research, an indicator is "a sign of the presence or absence of the concept [or variable] we are studying" (2014: 128). A good indicator must have a close correlation with the variable of interest. Starting now, unless specifically indicated, the term "indicator" will be used exclusively in reference to this particular meaning.

The crucial role of indicators in poverty measurement is underscored by a notable distinction made by Sen in his landmark *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (1981). There he claims that a given poverty's basal space can be measured in two ways: directly or through monetary indicators (Sen, 1981: 26-28).

The *monetary approach* to poverty measurement could help us to understand this distinction. The monetary approach has not one, but *two* favorite basal spaces: resources and well-being. As we have seen, on the one hand, poverty is commonly regarded as deprivation of resources and many researchers regard income as a good indicator of this space. On the other hand, many other researchers that adopt the monetary approach take poverty's basal space as being well-being. To make this clear, consider that a measure that follows the monetary approach adopts at least one of the following propositions:

1) Economic resources (*e.g.*, income or consumption) *constitute* what poverty's basal space *is*, that is, poverty is resource deprivation.

2) Income or consumption is the preferred indicator of poverty, as it is a good *proxy* for poverty's basal space – with well-being being the most adopted though not necessarily the only space.

The World Bank's economist Caterina Ruggeri Laderchi notes that by accommodating such disparate views, the monetary approach is less determined by its basal space than for its indicator (2000). This means that the monetary approach is one in which economic resources are the preferred indicator.[20]

The two propositions, (1) and (2), have been criticized by different poverty researchers. To start, proposition (1) may be seen as fetishistic, that is, it may mistake a general-purpose *means* like income to actual *valuable ends*, like satisfying people's needs, or their freedom to choose their life paths.[21] More relevant is that there is some evidence that people who experience poverty actually describe their own states as deprivations beyond low income, emphasizing their feelings of lacking agency and voice, or shame. If we take people's subjective perceptions as an authoritative source in researching poverty, this means that lack of income does not exhaust poverty's basal space.[22]

Against (2), income may be seen as a too-limited proxy for poverty's basal space, above all for those who take the space as being needs, well-being, or even resources. Income may be a limited proxy for resources, as it has been widely acknowledged that it is just one of a set of kinds of economic resources that are relevant for poverty. While capitalist economies are heavily commodified and as such income is the main exchange tool, a variety of resources and their related costs cannot be captured through it. Wealth (that is, non-durable goods like property and investments) and public services like water, access to health care, and education are not commonly captured by income measures. Income also fails to capture non-material resources, including an individual's status, aptitudes, and educational achievements. We shall see how a more

[20] Also, note that in this approach income or consumption plays the role of either the basal space or the measure indicator. Taking all this into account, the monetary approach is quite close to an operationalist view of measurement. Operationalism states that "the meaning of quantity-concepts is determined by the set of operations used for their measurement" (Tal, 2020: section 4). Indeed, common criticisms to the monetary approach, like those made by Townsend, resemble the critics directed to operationalism.

[21] The philosophical literature on the capability approach offers an array of arguments for this in normative terms (Robeyns & Byskov, 2020), but this is not important for us now.

[22] For a good review of transcultural evidence that feeling shame is a core feature of poverty, see Walker (2014).

comprehensive view of economic resources – one that includes non-income related resources – constitutes a major feature in Townsend's theory of poverty.

Income may be a limited proxy for someone's needs or well-being, as persons have differences in their features and circumstances. These differences entail that people with the same amount of income may have different abilities to satisfy their needs or to convert this resource into well-being. A great many of Sen's work was devoted to a painstaking focus on the diversity of people's characteristics and circumstances, such as someone's consumption behavior, the prices she faces, her age, gender, health, location, climate, etc. So, relying solely on income as a well-being indicator disregards the inherent diversity among people.[23]

It is for these reasons that one may try to capture poverty's basal space not through an income measure but *directly*.[24] Sen has introduced the distinction between monetary and direct indicators to capture the efforts of researchers that since the 1970s have been criticizing the reliance on income alone to measure poverty (Sen, 1981: 26-28). Those researchers have been developing measures that aim instead at what resources like income can make a person achieve – that is, basal spaces like well-being, needs, relative deprivation, or capabilities. In fact, we shall see how the whole tradition called "*social indicators*" is part of this effort.[25]

---

[23] As Sen himself notes (Sen & Foster, 1997: 214-16), there are a variety of ways that economists try to "extend" the informational sensitivity of an income measure to these personal variations. First, one may complement an income measure with other measures like unemployment rates, availability and reach of health care, and others. This is the suggestion of Rocha (2006: 27-28). However, this route makes comparisons of people's deprivation harder. The other strategy is to obtain "adjusted incomes" that try to convert these variations into income levels. A notable example are equivalence scales that estimate from household data the deprivation of groups in the population according to features like gender, age, or disability. The issue is that this requires strong theoretical assumptions, good household's data, or even subjective evaluations to determine differences in weights. The adequacy of these methods is far from settled, which explains at least part of the appeal of the direct method. For good discussions about this, see Atkinson (2019: ch. 3) and Deaton (2015: ch. 4). Also, we mentioned that Townsend takes a more comprehensive perspective on resources that transcends income alone. However, he ends up converting non-income resources into a broader income index to establish a ranking of the population based on an individual's resources. As we shall see (***Section 4.2.1***), this conversion faces challenges akin to those faced by economists, as Townsend himself assumed.

[24] I should note, however, that by "directly" I interpret that Sen does not mean measuring poverty without any indicator whatsoever but without an income-base indicator. A similar distinction between direct and indirect measures is found in the context of the literature on poverty in the UK, and in this literature direct measures are understood as non-income measures. Here, I am disagreeing with the economists Santos and Villatoro (2020), who interpret the direct approach as one that aims to capture *observed* deprivations. Gordon and Nájera (2020: 1791) object that it does not make sense to say that we can capture or observe poverty or any deprivation directly. After all, both notions are concepts and concepts are, by their very nature, unobservable entities. In this respect, I align with Gordon and Nájera.

[25] For a more recent account of the direct method compared to the income method in economics, see Alkire and Santos (2014). Two important papers on direct and indirect measures in the British context are Stein Ringen's "Direct and

Despite these criticisms, income is a popular and an important indicator of poverty. In the words of the American economist and statistician Mollie Orshansky, "[i]f money alone will not solve poverty, without it nothing else will work either!" However, she later adds that "[i]t is still a necessary if not a sufficient condition" (Orshansky, 1969: 39). As it is not a sufficient condition for measuring poverty, income should not be the *only* indicator of poverty. In fact, this is what many enthusiasts of the direct approach claim: that we should employ both income and non-income indicators, rather than income alone.

In a nutshell, income is a useful but limited indicator of someone's resources. Also, if poverty's basal space goes beyond someone's resources, and if this space is not adequately captured by income, we have another reason for at least not relying on them as our sole indicator of poverty.

Finally, let us look at six of the most important approaches in poverty measurement.

1.3. Six approaches

In this section we shall discuss six approaches in poverty measurement: monetary; subsistence; basic needs; relative deprivation; capabilities; and human rights. Each will be briefly described and put into a broader political and scientific context. Discussing these approaches will help us to better understand Townsend's work. After all, he developed his theory and cut-off measure of poverty to, *inter alia*, avoid what he regarded as the many shortcomings of these alternative approaches.

1.3.1. Monetary approach

Also called the "*income*" approach, we have seen how, in the monetary approach, income can play two roles: as poverty's basal space or as its indicator (propositions 1 and 2). Another notable feature of the monetary approach is its particular focus on the poverty line. It is true that measures based on all approaches can have a poverty line. But followers of the monetary approach are typically more worried about how to settle the poverty line than in arguing for a specific basal

Indirect Measures of Poverty" (1988) and Tim Callan, Brian Nolan, and Christopher T. Whelan's "Resources, Deprivation and the Measurement of Poverty" (1993).

space. As the line is set in terms of income, the approach is also called the "*income method*" (Sen, 1981: 26).

In a study of Brazilian monetary poverty from the 21st century onwards, the Brazilian sociologist Pedro H. G. F. de Souza writes that contemporary poverty research in Brazil tends to rely on what he calls "intuitive approaches to defining and measuring poverty," and that these approaches lack an "intrinsic interpretation" (Souza, 2022: 2). I believe we can interpret this omission as researchers not being concerned with specifying the basal space their income indicator should map. Souza continues saying that these intuitive approaches favor transparency in their construction and settle the poverty line in an *ad hoc* manner or in accordance with administrative poverty measures (2022: 2). In fact, an important kind of income measures are administrative poverty measures. These measures may have two purposes: an *administrative* purpose, like to determine whether someone is eligible for social benefits; and they may also work as an *official* standard according to which a country's statistical agency calculates the poverty dynamics in the country. Further, this standard may also serve as the reference point for establishing official objectives related to poverty reduction. Henceforth, I will use the terms "administrative line," "administrative measures," "official line," and "official measure" interchangeably to refer to the same kind of poverty measure.

The already mentioned World Bank's International Poverty Line (IPL) is the most notable administrative line. Also known as the "*extreme poverty line*" or "*dollar-a-day line*," its designers aimed "to quantify the extent of *absolute poverty* in the developing world, interpreted as the inability to attain consumption levels which would be deemed adequate only in the poorest countries" (Ravallion *et al.*, 1991: 346; original emphasis).[26]

Other examples of administrative lines are the US official measure of poverty and Brazil's *Programa Bolsa Família* (PBF) eligibility line. Following 1964 President Lyndon Johnson's "war on poverty," the then Office of Economic Opportunity adopted as the method to be deployed for statistical purposes the methodology developed by Mollie Orshansky. Since then, the Census

[26] We note that this passage suggests that IPL's intended basal space is household's consumption. However, consumption is typically taken as a proxy for someone's well-being. This kind of ambiguity in how to interpret the basal space is what lies behind the critics of the IPL by the Indian Economist Sanjay G. Reddy and the American philosopher Thomas Pogge (Reddy & Pogge, 2010). For the development of the IPL, see note 6 in this thesis' ***Introduction*** and Ferreira *et al.* (2016: 144-145).

Bureau provides annual poverty estimates in accordance with this monetary, official poverty measure.[27] The PBF line is an administrative measure that establishes those families that are eligible for the program's conditional cash transfer, and in its origin was based in the IPL and subsistence poverty lines. While Brazil lacks an official poverty line in the same sense of the US, the PBF line is taken as an important standard in research of poverty in the country.[28]

The adequacy of administrative poverty lines is a topic of debates and harsh critiques. We shall see that one of Townsend's motivations for developing his poverty line was to assess the adequacy of what may be regarded as UK's main administrative poverty measure of his time, namely, Britain's Supplementary Benefit Level. For Townsend, like many official measures, the Benefit Level was the result of the negotiation of political agreements during a particular era – the post-war consensus in Britain. Thus, the Benefit Level would have been largely influenced by contextual values.

Nevertheless, these agreements were themselves influenced by earlier attempts to establish this threshold level, not solely on political grounds but primarily on putatively scientific criteria.[29] The so-called "*subsistence approach*" provided the first of such criteria and to it I shall now turn.

1.3.2. Subsistence

The subsistence approach may be seen as the received view of how to settle the poverty line in a non-intuitive or based way. It may also be seen as the first approach to settle poverty's basal space before setting the line. As we have mentioned, the somewhat usual history states that

---

[27] For a brief overview of the official poverty measure in the US, see US Census Bureau (2014). For a more comprehensive presentation, see Fisher (1992). Since its inception, the measure has been hotly debated. For instance, in the 1990s an expert panel of the National Research Council was asked to suggest improvements to it. Its results can be found in *Measuring Poverty: A New Approach* (Citro & Michael, 1995). It is emblematic that one of its members, John F. Cogan, did not accept its recommendations, calling them "not scientific … [but] value judgments made by scientists – with a particular point of view" in a way that the scientists had "instead assumed the role of a government policy maker" (Cogan, 1995: 386). Only in 2012 the panel's suggestions were (only partially) followed by the implementation of a relative and supplementary measure, loosely inspired in Townsend's approach. For further information on this, see Short (2015).

[28] During the Federal plan *Brasil Sem Miséria* ("Brazil Without Extreme Poverty"), the PBF line also served as the benchmark for the plan's primary goal: eradicating extreme poverty. For an exploration of the history and origins of the PBF poverty line, as well as its role in this plan, see Falcão and da Costa (2014).

[29] I interpret Ravallion (2016) as providing the most developed account (in theoretical, normative, and methodological grounds) of the monetary approach insofar as he takes income measures as, to borrow an expression from Callan *et al.* (1991: 124), the best "starting point" for an analysis of poverty. I should mention, however, that Ravallion makes room for a variety of additional poverty measures, according to our different purposes and contexts.

the subsistence approach started with the studies of Booth and mainly Rowntree, which strove for scientific criteria that could settle political debates around the real state of poverty in Britain at their time (Ravallion, 2016: 67-72).

Rowntree famously distinguished poverty into primary and secondary. *Primary poverty* is the lack of minimum earnings necessary for the maintenance of minimum physical efficiency, or freedom from illness.[30] Firstly, we should note that more than a kind of deprivation, this conception of poverty precisifies that poverty is a kind of deprivation *with a given cause*. Not all conceptions and approaches of poverty do so. In the subsistence approach, we can interpret primary poverty's basal space as deprivation from minimum physical efficiency or freedom from illness *when caused by* the lack of the needed earnings. To settle this minimum for physical efficiency, Rowntree referenced the caloric intake required for physical efficiency, as established by nutritional studies conducted in prisons decades earlier by the American nutritionist Wilbur Atwater. Rowntree then selected the cheapest food items that could provide this caloric minimum and established a food budget. Lastly, the price of this budget was calculated and the line settled.

A natural question that follows: what bases the selection of these items? Further, one may also question the reason for determining the minimum food intake through nutritional studies. As mentioned earlier, the first question pertains to the issue of *item selection*, while the second concerns the *problem of the minimum*. Since Rowntree, an array of methods has been developed to construct what is often called "budget standards," each employing distinct methods for the selection of items and the determination of the minimum threshold. British sociologist David Piachaud (1987) proposed decades ago that these several methods can be divided into three broader groups. His classification remains relevant today, as evidenced by a recent review of various methods addressing these two issues (Deeming, 2020: 333-337):

- ***normative-expert item selection and determination of the minimum*:** based not on the preferences of the whole population or the people in poverty, but on experts-judgments

[30] This is why this approach is also called "minimum income for healthy living." However, Wolff observes that as "no level of nutrition or shelter can guarantee health," Rowntree's minimum concerns "a threshold level of resources whereby extra resources will not significantly reduce risk of ill-health through the goods one can purchase" (Wolff, 2015: 7).

about evidence and knowledge on human needs, good health, and well-being (*e.g.*, Rowntree's primary poverty);

- ***consensus selection and determination*:** based on non-expert consultation about which items non-experts take as part of a minimum need. This consultation can be made through quantitative methods like social surveys (*e.g.*, Mack & Lansley, 1985) or qualitative methods, like focus groups and deliberative forums (*e.g.*, Walker, 1987; 2014);
- ***behavioral selection and determination*:** based on people's observed patterns of consumption, captured mainly through national surveys about family and expenditure patterns (*e.g.*, Townsend's cut-off measure).

We will explore how both the issues of minimum and item selection are important to understand Townsend's relative deprivation approach. In the early stages of his career, Townsend critiqued Rowntree's normative food item selection by arguing it was unrealistic and not aligned with "the accepted modes of behavior in the communities in which they [poor people] live" (Townsend, 1954: 134). Accordingly, he introduced a behavioral selection method.

In any case, Rowntree observed that many families had sufficient earnings to achieve physical efficiency but nonetheless spent at least some of their earnings in other ways, like sending a letter to a relative or holding a birthday party for a child. In his first work of 1901, Rowntree called this state "*secondary poverty*" but, in 1936, he conducted a second study in York where he abandoned this distinction between primary and secondary poverty. He then adopted a single poverty line which was raised to give space for a "minimum but conventional" diet, housing expenditures, and a range of non-necessaries for physical survival. These include conventional social expenditures, like newspapers, books, radios, beer, tobacco, holidays, and presents (Veit-Wilson, 1986: 86-7). Certainly, the issue of item selection arises when choosing these non-food expenditures as well.[31]

Rowntree's work served as the basis for the standards of the post-war British Welfare State. The Labour government, which came to power in 1945, established the welfare state largely based

[31] The problems of establishing a minimum level for non-food items – or, more generally, for social or customary necessities –, was already discussed by Adam Smith and his predecessors, James Steuart, and Adam Ferguson (1981 [1776]: 870n2). Alfred Marshall also made a similar observation (1890: 59n1). In any case, we can say that Rowntree was a pioneer in setting a more structured method to arrive at this level.

on *The Social Insurance and Allied Services* (1942), a work by the liberal economist and social reformer William Beveridge. Known as the "Beveridge Report," this seminal work enumerated the "five giants" that social welfare reforms should address: Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor, and Idleness. The standard for assessing the elimination of Want was Rowntree's single poverty line. In his first study of 1901, Rowntree identified more than 25% of York's population in poverty. His 1936 study found that this number had dropped to 18%. In 1951, he conducted a third and last study in the same city and found that 1.5% were in poverty in 1950. Despite issues regarding the comparability of the results from the three studies, the consensus was that poverty had been effectively eradicated due to economic growth, full employment, the expansion of National Insurance, and the establishment of the National Health Service in post-war Britain.[32]

Income (more precisely, family earnings) is the preferred indicator of subsistence. And its basal space? One might answer it is obviously *subsistence*, as the name indicates. This is the most common interpretation and is also described as taking poverty's basal space as *subsistence needs*. This is the interpretation that Townsend aimed to challenge.[33]

Later on, economists refined Rowntree's 1936 line to add space for nonfood items in a more structured way. Here, the method to achieve a poverty line has two steps:

- First, we determine the income needed to purchase the minimum food budget and take this income as the *extreme* or *absolute* poverty line.
- Second, to obtain a higher line, we multiply the extreme poverty line up by the reciprocal of the proportion that a household spent on food. In economics, the multiplication factor is often called "Engel coefficient:" a household's food/total expenditure ratio.

Also referred to as the "*subsistence cost*," this approach was embraced by several economists. This was the case of Orshansky in her development of the US official measure of poverty (Fisher, 1992), and of the Brazilian Economist Sônia Rocha. The latter's analysis and

[32] Rowntree's 1936 study is *Poverty and Progress: A second and social survey of York*, and it was published in 1941. Conducted together with George R. Lavers, Rowntree's work of 1951 is *Poverty and the Welfare State: A third social survey of York dealing only with economic questions*.

[33] I should note, however, that this approach also has two alternative interpretations. We have seen that many welfare economists typically take poverty to be deprivation of well-being (***Section 1.1***). Thus, a second interpretation of the approach takes the subsistence level as a criterion for setting the level of income at which minimum well-being can be achieved. A third albeit less common interpretation takes the basal space to be the actual standard of living of working-class families (Veit-Wilson, 1986).

measures of poverty in Brazil influenced PBF eligibility lines since the program's inception (Rocha, 2006). The measures of both economists combine *normative-expert* and *behavior selection* criteria. For instance, Orshansky employs an expert-based criterion to settle the caloric minimum and a behavior- or consumer-based criterion to select both the food items and the value of the Engel coefficient. She drew the caloric minimum from the Department of Agriculture Food Plan of 1961. The plan consisted of what dietitians understood as nutrient requirements in a way that combined minimal costs and diet palatability (hence, a less strict version than Rowntree's primary poverty). The value of the Engel coefficient was based on a result of the Household Food Consumption Survey of 1955 indicating that one third of the income of families at all income levels was spent on food.[34]

Rowntree's primary poverty line was frugal and has since faced significant criticism. It has been argued that this line laid the foundation for justifying austere political poverty lines in both developed and developing countries. However, a more in-depth examination of his work reveals that Rowntree's primary goal with this poverty line was not to set a threshold for what people in poverty should have access to. For Veit-Wilson (1986: 73-74; 84), Rowntree's goal with primary poverty was to persuade a broader and skeptical elite about the extent of poverty by demonstrating that *even at such a meager level,* a considerably larger number of people were living in poverty. Accordingly, in Rowntree's survey, the poor were taken as not those deprived from subsistence needs but as those "in obvious want and squalor," with survey conductors identifying them through "visual inspection" (Gillie, 1996).

In fact, there is now plenty of evidence that Rowntree's work should be seen in a more positive light. First, Atkinson remarks that Rowntree's York studies contributed to Winston

[34] For a presentation and analysis of Orshansky's method, see Fisher's "The Development and History of the Poverty Thresholds" (1992). For Rocha, see her (2006: 15; and chapter 3). For a detailed presentation of Orshansky's use of the Household Food Expenditures and the Economy Food Plan, see Hanson (2008). In Brazil, the line that is based only on minimum calories is often called the line of "absolute or extreme poverty." Some economists like Rocha reserve the term "poverty" to refer to the higher line that incorporates nonfood spending, and refer to the lower line as the line of "indigência"/"miséria" ["indigence/extreme poverty"] (Rocha, 2006: 15). In fact, it can be argued that something close to this notion of subsistence cost formed the basis for the law regulating the minimum wage in Brazil and for the calculation of the "Salário Mínimo Necessário" ["Needed Minimum Wage"]. The latter is the minimum income required to meet the basic (nutritional and non-nutrional) needs of workers and their families as calculated by the main think tank of unions in Brazil, the *Departamento Intersindical de Estatística e Estudos Socioeconômicos* (Dieese, 2009). We shall say a little more about minimum caloric requirements when presenting Townsend's arguments for the relativity of caloric needs.

Churchill leaving the Conservative Party, joining the 1906 Liberal government and as a minister introducing labor exchanges and unemployment insurance (Atkinson, 2019: 29). Second, Rowntree has settled a typical "Fabian expedient" of showing that *according to political or widely accepted measures*, the extent of poverty is much larger than socially recognized. I am referring here to those members of the aforementioned Fabian Society who, before proposing new measures of poverty, creatively employed official statistics to advocate for social reform.

As a Fabian himself, Townsend deployed the same strategy when he, together with the economist Brian Abel-Smith, published the report *The Poor and the Poorest* on 1965 Christmas Eve. Within it, they adopted a poverty line based on an administrative measure – 140% of the current National Assistance level. Their results found that from 1953-54 to 1960-61 – a period of intense economic growth –, households in poverty increased from 10.1% to 17.9%. A growth, they claimed, of 4 million to 7.5 million people in poverty. This publication laid the groundwork for the emergence of social movements such as the CPAG and inspired a generation of social scientists, including Anthony Atkinson himself, to devote their careers to the study of poverty and inequality (Atkinson, 2019: 1).[35] *The Poor and the Poorest* played a pivotal role in the "rediscovery of poverty" in Europe during the 1960s, suggesting that the post-war British Welfare State had failed to eliminate one of Beveridge's five giants. More profoundly, it challenged the belief that "in a country [such as Britain] known as a Welfare State, there should be… no just causes left" (Townsend, 1958: 97).

It is true that the subsistence approach has remained popular to this day, adapting over time through the emergence of increasingly sophisticated variants.[36] Simultaneously, it has continued to be a primary source of criticism leading to the development of alternative approaches in poverty

[35] In a re-examination of *The Poor and the Poorest*'s results, Gazeley *et al.* (2017) deployed a more comprehensive data set and found that Abel-Smith and Townsend over-estimated the rise in absolute poverty. On the other hand, the two under-estimated the rise in relative poverty, which Gazeley *et al.* claim was a result of a large rise of household expenditure inequality in the period.

[36] Recent advancements in the subsistence approach significantly draw from George Stigler's (1945) method to arrive at a least-cost diet. One such advancement is presented by Allen (2017), who offers a notable alternative to the IPL for measuring global poverty. Additionally, works like Bai *et al.* (2022) provide estimates of the daily and per-calorie costs required to meet nutritional needs across various demographics, including age, sex, and reproductive status, and analyze the affordability of food groups necessary for these diets. Finally, Ibarra *et al.* (2021) analyze data from a recent Brazilian household budget survey to establish national poverty thresholds based on both food and non-food costs in the country. I thank Pedro de Souza for calling my attention to these further developments of the approach.

measurement since the 1960s, particularly the relative deprivation approach. We shall now turn to this that was Townsend's approach.

1.3.3. Relative deprivation

Outlined by Peter Townsend in two influential papers and fully developed in his 1979 book,[37] the relative deprivation approach in poverty measurement holds considerable influence in the UK and the European Union (EU).[38] As his theory and measure of poverty will be discussed in-depth in this thesis, this will be a brief section.

Townsend devised the relative deprivation approach in explicit opposition to the subsistence approach and the view that poverty is static, that is, invariant to different societies and different times. According to his conception, poverty's basal space is relative deprivation caused by a lack of resources. We shall see in detail that relative deprivation consists of deprivation from a society's standard of living. Also, we can already note that following the path of Rowntree's primary poverty, for Townsend there is poverty when this kind of deprivation has a specific cause, namely, lack of command over resources.[39] Among its most crucial points, the approach asserts that we cannot determine, irrespective of a specific society and its era, what constitutes poverty or what its extent is. Deprivation of even subsistence is, Townsend argues, contingent on the societal standards of a particular era. In a nutshell, all needs are social needs. Against what some might expect, we will discover that for him this social character does not render poverty subjective. Rather, at the heart of Townsend's approach lies the belief that only the relative deprivation approach can offer an "objective" theory and measure of poverty.

Together with this conception of poverty, Townsend favored a measure of poverty that I here call the "cut-off measure." The measure was based on the point of disproportion hypothesis, which states that if we rank society's resource distribution, we will find a given threshold or cut-

---

[37] The two seminal papers were both published in the *British Journal of Sociology*, "The measure of poverty" (1954) and "The meaning of poverty" (1962). In PITUK (1979), Townsend provides, as I will argue, a systematic account of the approach that he just refined in *The International Analysis of Poverty* (1993).

[38] Guio *et al.* (2012) provide a indicator of material deprivation for the EU inspired by Townsend's approach. I have also mentioned that Townsend's work has (in a much more limited way) influenced the US supplementary poverty line (see note 27 in this ***Chapter 1***).

[39] In ***Section 3.1.2*** of ***Chapter 3***, we will have an in-depth discussion dedicated to the role that resources play in Townsend's conception of poverty.

off level at which relative deprivation increases disproportionately. To operationalize this hypothesis, we need two *indexes*: one of total resources and the other of people's relative deprivation. Townsend's index of total resources is income-based, that is, he attempted to convert the different kinds of resources into an expanded notion of income. His index of relative deprivation was made up of sixty indicators, which were then reduced to a list of twelve items covering dietary, household, familial, recreational, and social deprivation (Townsend, 1979: 251). Individuals scoring on five or more of these indicators were classified as experiencing relative deprivation. He then checked whether there is such threshold level in society's ranking distribution where people's relative deprivation increased disproportionately. At that point, he claims, we should draw the poverty line.

Townsend is often called one of the forerunners of the view that poverty is *multidimensional* (Atkinson, 2019: 81; Beck *et al.*, 2020: 6). In Townsend words, a society's standard of living consists of "the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or are at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong" (Townsend, 1979: 31). In later works, he made explicit the multidimensional character of the relative deprivation, distinguishing material from social deprivation.[40]

Interestingly, we will observe that even in the work where Townsend dedicated the most pages to the cut-off measure – that is, PITUK –, he deployed a broader array of poverty measures. I argue that this reflects the systematic nature of his theory of poverty, in which the cut-off measure is just one though important element. Lastly, though not often recognized, the relative deprivation approach can be classified as needs based. Townsend at least interpreted it as such, as we shall see how he takes the drive to social integration as a basic necessity of all human beings. However, we should not mistake the relative deprivation approach with what the literature – and Townsend himself (1987b: 32; 35-37) – often calls the "basic needs approach." This is our topic now.

[40] I am referring to Townsend (1987a) and chapter 4 of his (1993).

1.3.4. Basic needs

While both the subsistence and the relative deprivation approach can and are called "needs-based" (insofar as they respectively refer to human physiological and social needs), there is a distinctive approach in poverty measurement often called "*basic needs approach.*" This approach is distinct from the previous two, both historically and conceptually.[41]

This approach appeared in the 1960s as the legacy of discussions about the limits of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measure of development in rich and above all poor countries. In the latter, high growth rates of GDP were not followed by the expected improvement in the life conditions of their populations. Initially sponsored by the US government, researchers started to develop measures of social progress that were not being captured by income or by indicators of economic growth more generally. This was the beginning of what has been called the "*social indicators' movement*" that would gain prominence in international development studies and policies.[42] Later on, international institutions like the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the International Labor Organization, and regional offices like the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean engaged in the design of measures that could map and incentivize investments in dimensions of development not captured through GDP.

The basic needs approach was the output of this movement when applied to development in general and poverty research in particular. The works of the Austrian-born British economist, Paul Streeten, can be seen as central formulations of it on a global level.[43] At the basis of this approach lies:

> the view that raising incomes alone is insufficient in view of the inefficiencies in the consumption patterns of the poor and the lack of availability of essential goods and services. Thus, any measure of poverty income, no matter how carefully derived, will be

[41] Here, I align with Rocha (2006), who reserves the term "basic needs" only for the tradition influenced by the social indicators' movement. Conversely, Sen (1981: ch. 3), Allen (2017), and Atkinson (2019: ch. 2) take the subsistence approach to be a species within the *genus* of basic needs approaches that is concerned mainly with physiological needs.
[42] For a presentation of the social indicators' movement, see the introduction of Springer's *Handbook of Social Indicators and Quality of Life Research* (Land *et al.*, 2012). The Brazilian statistician and public policy researcher, Paulo Jannuzzi (2017), offers a comprehensive account of social indicators in Brazil.
[43] Streeten's seminal works are "Indicators of Development: The Search for a Basic Needs Yardstick" with Norman Hicks (1979), and the collection he organized, *First things first: Meeting basic human needs in the developing countries* (1981).

> inadequate for measuring basic needs … An alternative approach is to develop better indicators of human, social and economic development which cover areas and aspects that cannot be reflected in most income-based measures. These so called 'social indicators' attempt to measure the development of health, nutrition, housing, income distribution, as well as other aspects of cultural and social development. (Hick & Streeten, 1979: 570).

This passage shows the distinctive rationale of the basic needs approach. First, it emphasizes that poverty is multidimensional and that we should look for direct measures, that is, measures that go beyond income (Sen, 1981: 26-28; Sen & Foster, 1997: 199n252). Second, like the subsistence approach, regards poverty's basal space as basic needs. However, it broadens the scope of those needs that are regarded as basic to encompass numerous dimensions beyond physiological requirements, incorporating into the equation distributional factors as well as cultural and social aspects.

Among the different branches of the basic needs approach, we find the *unsatisfied basic needs approach* (UBN), which was formulated in Latin America by Argentinian economists Luis Beccaria, Alberto Minujín, and Julio Boltvinik. Like other multidimensional and direct measures, the UBN does not deny altogether the adequacy of income-based measures. Citing Juan Carlos Feres and Xavier Mancero, the Argentine economist Maria Emma Santos points out that the UBN typically encompassed four dimensions: access to minimum housing standards; access to basic services that guarantee minimum sanitary conditions; access to basic education; and economic capacity to achieve minimum consumption level (Feres & Mancero, 2001: 67, *apud* Santos, 2014: 3).

The UBN was primarily developed to address the absence of household surveys in Latin America capable of measuring the income of its population. As income data from household surveys began to become more accessible, the UBN was combined with income-based poverty measures, giving rise to what was referred to as the "*integrated method*." The Argentine sociologist Carlos Hasenbalg (2003: 459) observed that this integrated approach distinguishes among four groups in a population: the *chronically poor*; the *structurally deprived*; the *recent poor*; and the *socially integrated* (see ***Table 1.1***). The significance of this typology stems from empirical evidence indicating that a considerable number of households classified as non-poor based on income criteria ("Out of income poverty," in ***Table 1.1***) actually were deprived of their basic needs

(Boltvinik, 1991: 427).[44] This point challenges the presumption that individuals or households above poverty lines determined by minimum food expenditures would also meet the thresholds for other essential needs. In other words, as some critics of monetary measures point out (***Section 1.2.2***), income measures would be bad indicators of deprivation across different basic needs.

Table 1.1 The integrated method: a combination of the UBN and the income method**. (Source:** Hasenbalg, 2003: 459.**)**

	Satisfied needs	**Unsatisfied needs**
Out of income poverty	Households **socially integrated**	Households **structurally deprived**
Income poor	Households **recently poor**	Households **chronically poor**

Until the 1990s, the basic needs approach served as the prevailing framework within the international development movement. However, this began to shift with the adoption and proliferation of the language and framework associated with the capabilities approach, into which we will now delve.

1.3.5. Capabilities

The capability approach was developed by the Indian economist and philosopher Amartya K. Sen, and the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum.[45] Similar to the basic needs approach, the development of the language of capabilities mirrored a movement advocating for the inclusion of factors beyond income when assessing social states. But it also resulted from debates in political philosophy on the metric of justice and its application to measurement exercises (***Section 1.2.1***).

Unlike the basic needs approach, the capability approach emphasizes not the *actual* states one achieves, but the set of possible states one could *choose to achieve*. More precisely, the capability approach directs our attention to the *freedom* an individual has to realize things we

[44] For an introduction to the UBN, see Santos (2014: 2-7). For an account of this approach in Portuguese, see Hasenbalg's "Pobreza no Brasil no final do século XX" (2003: 457-460).

[45] Sen's seminal article for the capability approach is "Equality of What?" (1980a). In poverty measurement, his "Poor, Relative Speaking" (1983) was the first to conceive of poverty as capability deprivation. The chapter 7 of *Inequality Reexamined* (1992) and the chapter 4 of *Development as Freedom* (1999) further expand his account. Nussbaum sorts out her theory of capabilities in *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (2000).

value, that is, it directs our attention to an individual's *capabilities* to achieve valuable *functionings*. More elegantly, Sen expresses the *Geist* of the approach this way: "A functioning is an achievement, whereas a capability is the ability to achieve" (Sen, 1987: 36).

In our context, this approach states that poverty's basal space should be *basic capabilities*, that is, the freedom to achieve *basic functionings*. Basic functionings are those things that we value and that are conditions for individuals to realize other things they value. Typical basic functionings are: being adequately nourished; being educated; being assisted by health treatment when in need; and leading a long and healthy life.[46] A crucial motivation for this approach is to give room for the possibility that individuals may have the relevant capability but *choose* not to convert it into a functioning. For instance, take the dozens of Brazilian political prisoners that voluntarily joined hunger strikes in protest to the Military Dictatorship that ruled the country from 1964 to 1985. These prisoners were deprived of the achievement of being well-nourished, but they were not deprived of the basic capability to be well-nourished.[47] Therefore, these prisoners were not living in poverty.

For the purposes of poverty measurement, there is an important distinction between Sen's and Nussbaum's account of capabilities. It concerns their way of selecting the capabilities that are considered basic and should constitute poverty's basal space. Based on a teleological and Aristotelian conception of the nature of human beings, Nussbaum notably offered a list of putatively universal (that is, applicable to any human society) basic capabilities. She argues that while the *manifestation* of each basic capability varies, its *content* is fixed. In contrast, Sen has repeatedly denied offering such a list of basic capabilities given the pivotal role of human agency and social deliberation in his theory. Hence, Sen takes the content of the list itself as a matter of social choice. This is why while it is appropriate to say that Nussbaum provides a *theory* of capabilities, Sen provides an *approach* to them.[48]

---

[46] In Sen's 1981 work, his analysis of poverty employs measures based on income and basic needs, as he had not fully developed the capability approach at that time. However, in the same work, he had already pointed out the many limitations of indirect measures in accounting for parametric variations in individuals' ability to convert income into well-being. This concern persists, he argued, even when corrective mechanisms such as equivalence scales are considered (see note 23 in this ***Chapter 1***).

[47] If we assume, of course, that the prisons of the dictatorship did not deprive them of food.

[48] In "Capabilities as fundamental entitlements: Sen and social justice" (2003), Nussbaum develops her argument for a universally applied list of basic capabilities. In contrast, Sen accepts that non-capability-based poverty measures can be justifiable, depending on the context or purpose of the measure. Here, I am following Baujard and Gilardone's

It is widely known how hard it is to measure capabilities, as they refer not to actual but to *possible* states. While in the last decades there have been a great many methods for operationalizing them, in practice, most measures aim at basic capabilities indirectly through indicators of basic functionings deprivation. The rationale is that basic functionings deprivation is a good indicator of basic capabilities deprivation. Accordingly, the main practical influences of the approach in poverty measurement rely on functionings' indicators to capture, indirectly, capabilities. This is the case of indicators like the Human Development Index (HDI) from the UNDP and the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) from the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative and UNDP.[49]

1.3.6. Human rights

The human rights approach to poverty measurement is peculiar in many senses. Straightforwardly, it conceives of poverty as both a deprivation and, more importantly, a violation of basic human rights. These related but distinct notions of *deprivation* and *violation* have broader consequences for how poverty is measured and what the human rights approach implies for people *not* in poverty.

The approach can have important consequences for the outcomes of the measures so constructed. This is aptly noted by Atkinson (2019: 49-51), who compares how the human rights approach may differentiate itself from the subsistence approach. The US' official poverty measure for many years set the poverty line lower for women than for men. After all, women have typically less caloric needs. However, from the point of view of human rights, such a differentiation may be unacceptable as one could argue that every individual is entitled to equal rights and protections under the law. Differentiating poverty lines by gender may entail treating men and women unequally, suggesting that their rights should be valued differently. In fact, some may argue that

(2017) argument that Sen's main concern was not to provide a capability theory but to show why, when evaluating social states, we should expand the kind of information we take as our basal space. The "we" here is pivotal: Sen's priority is to favor public reasoning, where individuals' agency helps choose what should count in their social evaluations. Capabilities would then play only a heuristic role in his defense of democratic deliberation. Also, as we shall see below (***Conclusion, iii***), Sen's emphasis on democratic deliberation in assessing social states is similar to the main motivation behind consensual approaches. See also note 9 in ***Chapter 2***.

[49] Comin *et al.* (2008) is a reference work about what is at stake when operationalizing this approach, and also in presenting several methods for doing so. Also, Chamberlain (2021) notes that while the HDI and the MPI are inspired and animated by the capability approach, several of its properties contradict important *dicta* of it.

this contradicts the principle of non-discrimination, which is fundamental to human rights. Hence, the poverty line should be set at the same level for both men and women.

Furthermore, the approach suggests sources for selecting a poverty measure's basal space. Atkinson also notes that international documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are *lists* of things that any human being is entitled to, and thus whose deprivation is a human right violation (Atkinson, 2019: 50-51). For instance, Article 25 of the Declaration states the right to a standard of living "adequate for the health and well-being of himself [sic] and of his [sic] family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services" (UN, n.d.). If we adopt this approach, this conception of standard of living could be taken as a precisification of poverty's basal space.

Atkinson also argues that freedom from poverty may be considered an essential human right, as it could be a precondition for enjoying all other human rights. This implies certain consequences as failure to address poverty can be seen as a violation, a breach of *obligations*, subjecting responsible actors such as governments to international censure. Furthermore, upholding human rights takes *precedence* over other principles, such as prioritizing efficiency or distributing resources based on merit.[50] All this would strengthen the view discussed above (***Section 1.2.1***) suggesting that eliminating poverty is ultimately a matter of justice.

The most comprehensive account of the human rights approach can be found in discussions within the UN's Human Rights Council. The council appoints a Special Rapporteur "to examine and report back to [UN] member States on initiatives taken to promote and protect the rights of those living in extreme poverty, with a view to advancing the eradication of such poverty" (Alston, 2020: 1).

Recent reports have contained strong criticisms of the World Bank's IPL as a standard for monitoring the international effort to combat global poverty. In his 2020 *Report on extreme poverty and human rights*, the then Special Rapporteur Philip Alston stated that:

> By single-mindedly focusing on the World Bank's flawed international poverty line, the international community mistakenly gauges progress in eliminating poverty by reference

[50] A full-depth analysis of what this implies is out of scope here, so I just refer the reader to reference work. Pogge (2008) is a seminal text on this approach, and Wisor (2012) argues that an adequate measure of global poverty must conceptualize it as a violation of human rights. For a range of perspectives within this approach, see Gaisbauer *et al.* (2016: part 1).

> to a standard of miserable subsistence rather than an even minimally adequate standard of living. This in turn facilitates greatly exaggerated claims about the impending eradication of extreme poverty and downplays the parlous state of impoverishment in which billions of people still subsist. (Alston, 2020: 1)

In his recommendations on the properties that an adequate global poverty measure should possess, Alston suggests that such a measure should be "explicitly tied to the satisfaction of basic needs and capabilities" (Alston, 2020: 19).[51] In practice, the human rights approach can, and indeed often is, combined with the relative deprivation and capabilities approaches. The primary distinction between these combined approaches and their traditional, "pure" versions lies in the normative implications brought by the language of human rights.[52]

Now, to close my presentation of approaches in poverty measurement, it is of some worth to compare them. This is the theme of the last section of this chapter.

1.4. Comparing approaches

In this comparison exercise, my starting point will be the capability approach. I choose this approach because it was developed to overcome the perceived limitations of resource-based, well-being-based, basic needs-based, and even relative deprivation-based approaches. More importantly, this choice will make more salient the similarities and differences between the capability approach and Townsend's preferred approach. (The reader will find ***Table 1.2*** at the end of the chapter, which outlines the main elements of each approach for easy reference.)

Capabilities point towards a chain that connects a person's access to resources and her well-being. While in economics these resources are mainly interpreted as someone's access to income (or commodities), in our context we are considering resources in a more inclusive manner, encompassing various kinds of economic resources. This is what that chain drawn by Sen himself (with minor adaptations) aims to represent (Sen, 1982: 30):

Resources → Characteristics → Capabilities → Well-being

[51] He further adds that "no one measure can replace the broad dashboard of multidimensional indicators that reflect modern expectations of a life free of poverty, aligned with human rights guarantees" (Alston, 2020: 19).
[52] See note 8 in this thesis' ***Conclusion***.

Let us revisit our earlier example of political prisoners. Suppose, reasonably, that their health has deteriorated due to fasting. In this scenario, to attain the same nutritional status as a well-nourished but free person, the prisoners' dietary and caloric needs would be different (maybe higher). This highlights the limitations of using a resource-metric as an indicator of someone's deprivation, due to its insensitivity to these kinds of parametric variations.

Additionally, although the basic need for food remains unmet for them, thus impacting their personal well-being and leading to significant suffering, this deprivation is a result of their own choice. Therefore, while they have not been deprived of the basic capability to be well-nourished, it is reasonable to assert that they have voluntarily chosen to forgo satisfying this basic need. This distinction would highlight a crucial limitation of the basic needs approach – namely, its insensitivity to people's choices.

Considering their human rights, as political prisoners under a dictatorship, they face undeniable restrictions in political participation. However, their fundamental right to food remains intact, as their fasting is a self-imposed sacrifice. In Sen's terms, they are forgoing a well-being achievement for an "agency achievement" (Sen, 1987: 28).[53] Thus, the capabilities approach provides a framework that supports some people's intuitions that these political prisoners, despite their nutritional deprivation, are not in poverty. In fact, one might argue that the approach helps us to grasp why it makes little sense to say that the self-imposed nutritional deprivation of the political prisoners is a result of their poverty; while, at the same time, the involuntary deprivation faced by individuals like Esmeralda is aptly described as poverty.[54]

Now, let us explore the relationship between the capabilities approach and the relative deprivation approach. To begin, it is important to recognize their similarities. Both approaches agree that the assessment of someone's deprivation and poverty should not focus primarily on her resources. Townsend's rationale for looking beyond mere resources mirrors Sen's: the variability in people's conditions and in their respective different needs. As we shall see below (***Section***

[53] In fact, considering the context, their fasting might be interpreted as a peak exercise of their capabilities.

[54] The converse situation, where someone's nutritional achievement is not followed by her capability for it, is thus described by the words of the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish: "The description of a freedom that cannot find its bread. / The description / Of bread without the salt of freedom, or praise of a dove / Flying far from longing…" (2014 [1995]: 80).

5.3.1), much of Townsend's research focuses on the unique needs and deprivations of what he calls "social minorities," such as children, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities.

We could also compare how each approach conceptualizes the notion of standard of living. Both acknowledge that there is a distinction between the standard of living of an individual or a group, such as a specific class, and that of a broader society or country. They also stress the importance of assessing the inequalities between the two.

For the relative deprivation approach, someone's standard of living is made of a mix of consumer *goods* (or commodities), *customs*, and *activities* (Townsend, 1979: 59). Poverty then occurs when people cannot join the standard of living of her society due to a lack of resources. Or to put it differently, Townsend says that given lack of resources they are deprived of:

> the conditions of life – that is, the diets, amenities, standards and services – which allow them to play the roles, participate in the relationships and follow the customs which are expected of them by virtue of their membership of society. (Townsend, 1987b: 130)

I must remember that these conditions are not only material but also *social*, and the deprivations they entail encompass both material and *social* deprivations (Townsend, 1987b: 127-129). Social deprivations, as Townsend elaborates, are deprivations from activities like "entering into community or social relationships" or "the right – or responsibilities – open to them as citizens" (Townsend, 1987b: 128).

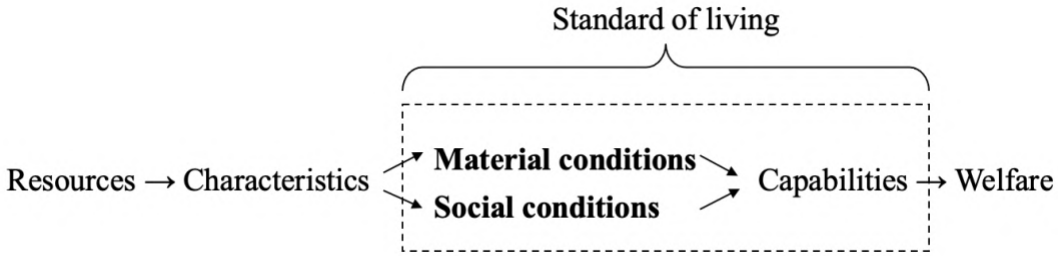
We will delve into these elements of Townsend's theory in more detail later. Turning to Sen, how does he define the standard of living? As we can infer from the title, in *Standard of Living* (1987), Sen sorts out his understanding of this concept and relates it to capabilities, to poverty, and to evaluations and rankings of social states. Sen's conception diverges significantly from the traditional economic views that equate standard of living with economic opulence or well-being. He argues that standard of living "must be directly a matter of the life one leads rather than of the resources and means one has to lead a life" (Sen, 1987: 16). More precisely, he sees an individual's standard of living as a *collection of her capabilities* and, predominantly, their *functioning achievements*.[55] In other words, it concerns all the "aspects of the life that he or she

[55] Sen claims that functionings "are, in a sense, more directly related to living conditions, since they *are* different aspects of living conditions," but when we take a "refined" view of functionings we must include, when assessing someone's achievement, her capability of choosing other achievements (Sen, 1987: 36; original emphasis). As he puts

succeeds in living. The various 'doings' and 'beings' a person achieves are thus potentially all relevant to the evaluation of that person's living standard" (Sen, 1987: 29).[56]

Let me now adapt the framework I have previously presented to now incorporate Sen's conception of standard of living. ***Figure 1.1*** shows how it would fit:

Figure 1.1 The place of Sen's conception of standard of living within his chain. **(**Author's own elaboration.**)**



Additionally for Sen, a society's standard of living is given by the aggregation of the standards of its people. This bears similarities to Townsend's notion of standard of living, especially in the emphasis on an individual's beings and doings, resonating with Townsend's idea of social deprivation as primarily linked to a person's activities. In fact, both Townsend and Sen adopt a non-fetishistic perspective, treating resources as means to achieve what they consider the relevant basal space for poverty measurement.

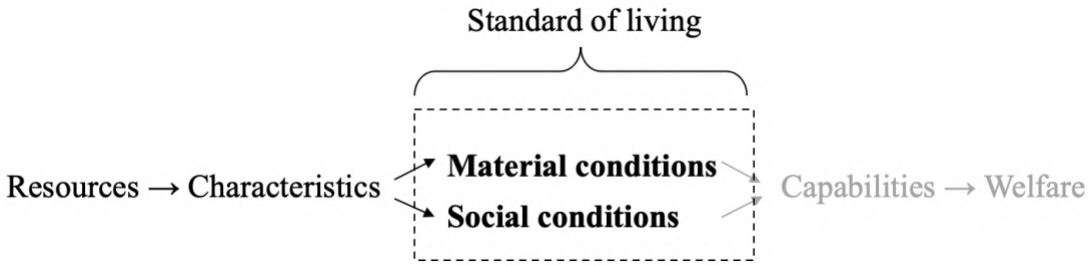
Does this mean that Sen's conception aligns with Townsend's conception of the standard of living? I believe it does not. We have observed that according to the relative deprivation approach, an individual's standard of living is composed of their material and social conditions. However, there is no space here to accommodate the consideration of an individual's opportunities to achieve alternative conditions (Townsend, 1987b: 127-129). Therefore, a more fitting scheme in the context of Townsend's theory for an individual's standard of living would be something like ***Figure 1.2***:

---

it, "[c]hoosing *A* when *B* is also available is a different 'refined' functioning, it can be argued, from choosing *A* when *B* is not" (1987: 37).

[56] More precisely, Sen's notion of standard of living is restricted to an agent's own capabilities and functionings *minus* (to borrow a formulation by Bernard Williams) "all the desires or objectives that do not refer to the agent him- or herself" (Sen, 1987: 109). In that sense, the standard of living of the political prisoners is not affected by the conditions of their fellow citizens. This despite the fact that they, as political prisoners, are concerned with their nationals' fate.

Figure 1.2 The place of Townsend's conception of standard of living within Sen's chain **(**Author's own elaboration.**)**



However, the most significant divergence between Townsend and Sen lies not in their conceptions of the standard of living *per se*, but in the role this conception plays within their respective approaches to poverty. First of all, in Townsend's relative deprivation approach, the pivotal notion is a society's standard of living. This is his poverty's basal space. In contrast, in Sen's capability approach, not standard of living but basic capabilities are poverty's basal space.

This difference can be interpreted in two complementary ways. First, it is important to recognize that, as previously mentioned, both someone's and a society's standard of living is an *achievement*, whereas basic capabilities represent the *ability* to achieve these outcomes (Sen, 1987: 109-110). In other words, Sen views poverty's basal space as a deprivation of a specific kind of *opportunity* – namely, the basic capability to choose among possible states, that is, functionings. On the other hand, Townsend takes poverty's basal space as a deprivation of a certain type of *outcome* – specifically, the actual state of people's participation in the standard of living of their society.

The second interpretation focuses on the differences in the *levels of abstraction* each considers adequate for a conception of poverty. We can say that as a notion, the standard of living is less abstract than that of capabilities, that is, the concept of standard of living can be described as descriptively richer, or "thicker," than that of capabilities. To describe a standard of living, one must refer to a detailed set of objects and practices specific to a certain time and place, which is not necessary when describing capabilities. For Sen, poverty represents not just a deprivation of any capabilities, but specifically of *basic* capabilities. As we shall discuss below (***Section 3.1.1.b***),

these basic capabilities are absolute, that is, they do not vary over time and across societies, or alternatively, are not *relative* to time and society.[57]

Let me make this more concrete with a notable passage in Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*. There, Smith is discussing the concept of "necessaries:" [58]

> A linen shirt, for example, is, strictly speaking, not a necessary of life. The Greeks and Romans lived, I suppose, very comfortably though they had no linen. But in the present times, through the greater part of Europe, a creditable day-labourer would be ashamed to appear in public without a linen shirt, the want of which would be supposed to denote that disgraceful degree of poverty which, it is presumed, nobody can well fall into without extreme bad conduct. (Smith: 1981 [1776]: 86)

Both Townsend (1979: 32-33) and Sen (1983: 159) reference this passage, but they interpret it differently and with their respective purposes in mind. Sen posits that the ability to avoid shame due to an inability to meet societal conventions is a basic capability. Thus, being deprived of the capability to avoid shame is, in any place and time, part of poverty's basal space (Sen, 1983: 161).[59] What varies across different places and times are the resources (or commodities) required to realize this capability, or to convert it into the functioning of shame avoidance. In 18th Century England, the customs rendered a linen shirt part of the required set of resources, though this resource was not similarly required in Ancient Greek or Rome. In Sen's formulation, those deprivations that constitute poverty are absolute in the space of capabilities and relative in the space of functionings (Sen, 1983: 167-168). So, for him, the standard of living is relevant to poverty only insofar as it determines the specific forms of capability realization.

---

[57] One might argue that the notion of basic capabilities is incompatible with Sen's open-ended list of capabilities that are available for democratic deliberation in each social group (see note 48 in this ***Chapter 1*** and note 9 in ***Chapter 2***). I will not delve into this point further.

[58] The existence of social needs has long been a subject of discussion in the social sciences, predating even Smith. James Steuart argued that "mankind have [sic] two kinds of 'necessary'; the physical needs for food, shelter, etc., and an additional set of requirements 'which distinguishes what we call rank in society', where the latter is determined by 'birth, education, or habit. A man with difficulty submits to descend from a higher way of living to a lower" (1767, *apud* Smith, 1981 [1776]: 870n2). More than a century later, Alfred Marshall claimed something similar: "perhaps, some consumption of alcohol and tobacco, and some indulgence in fashionable dress are in many places so habitual, that they may be said to be *conventionally necessary* …Their wages are therefore less than are practically necessary for efficiency, unless they provide not only for what is strictly necessary consumption, but include also a certain amount of conventional necessaries" (Marshall, 1890: 58; original emphasis).

[59] We have seen that there is cross-cultural evidence for shame being part of at least the experience of poverty (Walker, 2014). Townsend might well accept this but distinguish the *experiences* associated with poverty, cross-cultural as they may be, from what *constitutes* poverty, which, as we shall see below (***Section 3.1.1.c***), is a non-subjective matter for him.

In contrast, we shall see that for Townsend, discussing poverty abstractly, detached from a specific time and society, does not make sense. According to him, poverty involves deprivations determined by a specific society at a specific time and should thus be described according to this time and society. Ergo, they should be described in detail. For instance, it might be the case that shelter deprivation may be a component of poverty in all times and societies but:

> Isn't the idea of "shelter" relative not just to climate and temperature but to what society makes of what shelter is for? The three little pigs had different ideas of the meaning of shelter. Shelter includes notions of privacy, space to cook and work and play and highly cultured notions of warmth, humidity and segregation of particular members of family and different functions of sleep, cooking, washing and excretion. These are social notions and this is what I would want to insist upon. (Townsend, 1985a: 667)

Privacy, space to cook, work, play. Functions of sleep, cooking, washing and excretion. These notions add up in detail the kind of deprivation poverty is, as they refer to more concrete elements than subsistence and shame. And accordingly, they should figure in an adequate measure of poverty, one that takes into account their social specificities. For Townsend, cooking in 18th Century England is, in an important sense, a different activity from cooking in 21st Century England, and even more different from cooking in 21st Century Brazil. In each, they relate to different forms of deprivation that a measure of poverty should be able to capture.

Some readers may question whether Townsend's preference for the standard of living over capabilities as poverty's basal space is compatible with his commitment to value-freedom. To start, why should we prioritize the standard of living instead of capabilities as the relevant deprivation space? Well, one might say that the only of doing so is by appealing to contextual values that show, for instance, that we should prioritize outcomes instead of opportunities. However, in that case the selection of poverty's basal space would be, contrary to Townsend's ultimate goal (***Section 1.2.1.d***), a contextual judgment. We will explore this conundrum further below (***Section 3.1.1.d***).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen two sets of important notions in poverty measurement. The first set encompasses three pivotal elements in poverty measures: the kind of deprivation that constitutes poverty, to wit, the deprivation space; the indicator of the basal space; and the poverty line. The second set refers to the notion of approaches. I have argued that an approach in poverty

measurement is primarily defined by its basal space and its indicator. Further, we have seen that when making the notion of a given basal more precise, two controversial questions arise: How to select the items that constitute, for instance, a food basket that can guarantee subsistence or a set of commodities and activities that constitute a standard of living? And how do we determine the minimum threshold that differentiates the poor from the non-poor? Essentially, these questions revolve around how to establish the poverty line.

Townsend's approach of poverty as relative deprivation was developed in opposition to previous approaches, especially the subsistence-based one. Notably, it shares significant similarities with the capabilities approach, such as the focus not merely on resources but on what these resources enable an individual to achieve. However, there is an important difference concerning what resources help to achieve and whose deprivation constitutes poverty: for Townsend, it is participation in a society's standard of living, an actual and descriptively richer state; for Sen, it is basic capabilities, not actual and more abstract states.

One of the key motivations for developing various approaches to poverty measurement has been the need for criteria to establish a non-arbitrary poverty line. We have also examined how proposed poverty lines, as well as other elements of a poverty measure, have historically faced criticisms for being unscientific, subjective, and ultimately arbitrary. Addressing these criticisms is particularly crucial in Townsend's theory and his cut-off measure, which he claimed was based on a "scientific" and "objective" line. Townsend believed that such arbitrariness could be minimized only by reducing the influence of social beliefs and contextual values in the choices one faces when designing a theory and measure poverty. The reasons for this stance and the methods he envisioned to implement it can be better understood through the lenses of the philosophy of measurement and the philosophy of science and values. These topics will be the focus of our next chapters.

Table 1.2 Approaches in poverty measurement. **(**Author's own elaboration.**)**

	CONCEPTION			**MEASURE**		**DISCIPLINES**
	Deprivation	**N. of dimensions**	**Cause**	**Indicator(s)**	**Cut-off**	
MONETARY	income, well-being	one	unspecified	income or consumption	determined by physical needs or by administrative or political criteria	economics
SUBSISTENCE	physiological needs	one	lack of resources	income or consumption	determined by a minimum nutritional level	economics; international development
BASIC NEEDS	basic needs (*e.g.*, food, health, social participation)	multi	unspecified	health, education, employment, culture etc.	determined by administrative or political criteria	social indicators; international development
RELATIVE DEPRIVATION	society's standard of living	multi	lack of resources	resources (income-based) and someone's standard of living	determined by the point of disproportion hypothesis	sociology; international development
CAPABILITIES	basic capabilities	multi	unspecified	functionings	political (democratic deliberation)	development economics; international development
HUMAN RIGHTS	human rights	multi	unspecified	basic needs-, standard of living- or capabilities-based	political	philosophy of development and of global justice; international law; international development

CHAPTER 2

Systematicity, Middle-Range Theory, and CRP

Introduction

Let me start with some terminology. What are commonly called "*theories of poverty*" often refer to a coherent set of propositions about the *causes* of this phenomenon.[1] However, the success of any scientific endeavor depends not only on theory in this narrow sense but on a variety of products that make up for the success or failure of a theory in a *broader sense*. This means that success depends on a set of scientific products about a subject that are, in the right manner, connected internally and also to other domains (Cartwright, 2020a; 2020b).[2] It is in that sense that I refer to "*Townsend's theory of poverty*," that is, to the set of a variety of scientific products, like a conception of poverty; hypotheses about the elements that constitute his conception; the tools to test the hypotheses; observations about human behavior; an explanation of poverty; a report on how the research was conducted; and what he regarded as the "policy prescriptions" of his theory. We shall see how this broader sense of the term better reflects, as T. H. Marshall have noted (1981: 85), the *systematic* character of his research, among which his conception and his favorite measure of poverty are important though just some elements. In the literature discussing Townsend's work, his conception and above all his measure of poverty are most often taken to be his major contributions to the theme. I believe this is at best an incomplete assessment of his work. The other elements in his theory of poverty not only enrich his account of the phenomenon but, I think, are crucial to better understand the conception and measure themselves.

With a systematic theory, Townsend aimed to overcome what he regarded as a crucial flaw in different conceptions and measures of poverty: their *arbitrary* and *ad-hoc* character. His theory of poverty, in contrast, grounds or provides the reasons for considering his conception and measure of poverty as superior to its alternatives. Or alternatively, his conception and measure of poverty are non-*ad-hoc* because they are integrated into a theory that satisfies criteria scientific theories should meet.

---

[1] In fact, this is how Townsend employs the term (1979: ch. 4; 1993: ch. 5).

[2] Cartwright provides a non-exhaustive list of these products (she talks about "scientific outputs"): "from theories and models to concepts and measures, studies and experiments, data collection, curation and coding, methods of inference, narratives, devices, technologies, plans and science-informed policies, and more" (Cartwright, 2020a: 2).

To show why Townsend's is a systematic theory, we need to clarify the notion of systematicity itself. A scientific theory can be systematic in three ways. First, it may align with philosopher of science Paul Hoyningen-Huene's (2013) conception of systematicity in science. According to Hoyningen-Huene, systematic scientific theories perform well across different dimensions like descriptions, explanations, predictions, epistemic connectedness, and an ideal of completeness (or of unification). Moreover, they score better in those dimensions than common sense knowledge. Second, a theory can be considered systematic because it is a *middle-range theory* (Merton, 1968: ch. 2; Cartwright, 2020b). Middle-range theories are characterized by: their focus on a narrower range of phenomena than broad-range theories; their more precisely defined concepts; and for ultimately bridging empirical data with more abstract theoretical assertions. This latter bridging function fosters greater unification, enhancing systematicity in Hoyningen-Huene's sense. Indeed, the set of products in Townsend's theory that we mentioned above constitutes a middle-range theory of poverty.

Third, a theory can be systematic because its measure aligns with the measurement theory developed by Norman Bradburn, Nancy Cartwright, and Jonathan Fuller (Bradburn *et al.*, 2017). This theory posits that a good measure consists of three key elements: a conception; a formal representation of the conception; and procedures for collecting and processing the relevant data. These elements must be substantiated by solid arguments and also be in the right relationship with each other. In this way, the measure can exhibit improved performance in the dimensions of defending knowledge claims and epistemic connectedness. I refer to this framework as "*CRP*," standing for **c**onception, **r**epresentation, and **p**rocedures. CRP sheds light on pivotal decisions in poverty measurement. This involves precisifying a concept through refining its intension and extension, and possibly altering its ordinary meaning. Further, it involves making decisions about its formal representation, such as choosing what its measurement scale will be. And lastly, determining the rules for applying the measure to empirical data, which involves collecting and processing the data, as well as checking for its reliability. We shall see that one of the main advantages of CRP is its emphasis on epistemic soundness rather than truth, as well as its compatibility with diverse ontological perspectives on measurement. I argue we can interpret Townsend's theory as systematic not only in the first two senses but also in this third sense of systematicity.

Not only the cut-off measure, but the bulk of Townsend's theory of poverty is presented in *Poverty in the UK* (PITUK), his main work on the matter. Thus, this is my primary source for interpreting the theory. Curiously, a detailed examination of PITUK reveals that Townsend employed not just his cut-off measure but also three additional measures of poverty. This, I will argue, is also a manifestation of the theory's systematicity.

***

Sections' outline

Section 2.1 outlines and discusses the three senses in which Townsend's theory is systematic. ***Section 2.2*** discusses the CRP measurement theory in detail, with a focus of showing how it can provide a useful framework to grasp key decisions that poverty measurement involves. The chapter concludes with two notes in ***Section 2.3***. First, it calls attention to PITUK, my primary source for interpreting Townsend's theory. Second, it presents the four poverty measures Townsend employs in the book to analyze poverty.

2.1. A systematic theory

In this section, I try to make the notion of systematicity more precise by showing three senses in which Townsend's theory is systematic: it differs from everyday knowledge about poverty; it is part of a middle-range theory of poverty; and it fits within CRP measurement theory. Let us examine each in turn.

2.1.1. It differs from everyday knowledge about poverty

Townsend's theory is systematic in the same way that philosopher of science Paul Hoyningen-Huene (2013) claims scientific theories are systematic: they differ from everyday knowledge in their level of systematicity. According to Hoyningen-Huene, the systematicity of scientific theories manifests in nine dimensions: descriptions, explanations, predictions, the defense of knowledge claims, critical discourse, epistemic connectedness, an ideal of completeness (or of unification), knowledge generation, and the representation of knowledge.

Systematicity is what gives science authority over its alternatives, like religion and astrology. In this respect, Hoyningen-Huene offers an answer to the demarcation problem that animated philosophy of science throughout the 20th Century. His notion of systematicity has two

advantages. First, none of the nine dimensions are necessary or sufficient conditions, as Hoyningen-Huene (2013: 28) recognizes that the relationship between them is one of family resemblance, in Wittgenstein's sense. This accommodates the common observation that science is diverse in its methods and thus that some responses to the demarcation problem fit well with important scientific theories, but not with others that are equally authoritative.[3]

More importantly, by describing science's systematicity in contrast with ordinary or common knowledge, Hoyningen-Huene's claim aligns well with the argument of this thesis: that Townsend's theory is best understood as an effort to respond to epistemic values, instead of contextual values in poverty research. Put another way, we could interpret Townsend's effort to develop his theory in tandem with epistemic values as a way to make his theory systematic. And he did this because widely accepted beliefs about poverty lack systematicity precisely because they are influenced by contextual values. Ultimately, Townsend aimed to make his theory influence social beliefs and displace, at least partly, what he regarded as the wrong common sense about poverty. In fact, only then could his theory inform public policies to combat poverty. For him, systematicity is a vaccine against ideology (see ***Introduction, ii***).[4]

2.1.2. It is part of a middle-range theory

The second sense in which his theory is systematic is that it bridges the study of poverty with broader economic and sociological theories on social inequality.[5] In other words, his theory of poverty is an instance of what some social scientists and philosophers call *middle-range theories* (Merton, 1968: ch. 2; Alexandrova, 2017: xxxix-xli; Cartwright, 2020b: 277). These theories are better understood in contrast to *broad-range theories*, whose concepts are more abstract and attempt to explain a broader set of (potentially all) societal facts. Think about rational choice

[3] Take the case of the Popperian capability of being falsified. While it fits well in explaining major breakthroughs in physics, it has difficulties accounting for the theory of evolution.

[4] Griffiths (1997: ch. 7) and Alexandrova and Fabian (2022: 6) note that a common view in the history and philosophy of science regards the conceptualization of nature in fruitful and new (also called "technical") ways as an important scientific achievement. As he proposes a new conception of poverty, here as elsewhere Townsend's theory aligns with the dictums of esteemed strands in the philosophy of science.

[5] This is not an original interpretation, as it is common to attribute to Townsend an account of poverty that relates it to inequality. In the literature, this attribution often takes the form of a simple charge that Townsend committed a well-known error by mistaking poverty for inequality. Exceptions are T. H. Marshall's (1981) and Ian Gough's (1981) reviews of PITUK, which, while capturing the core of Townsend's proposal, have gone quite unnoticed.

theory, Max Weber's theory of social action, Durkheim's functionalism, or Karl Marx's historical materialism. In contrast, middle-range theories target specific social phenomena and employ concepts that are less abstract, as seen in social capital theory, the theory of alienation, theories on the origins of capitalism, and, of course, a theory of poverty. One of the main goals of middle-range theories is to connect broad-range theories with concepts that are less abstract, more specific working hypotheses and in this way allowing for testing them.

In any case, both this sense and Hoyningen-Huene's account of systematicity display a high level of abstraction that may be insufficient to make this notion meaningful (2013: 25-30). More importantly, this account of systematicity leaves out a crucial aspect of what I have been calling Townsend's theory of poverty: a set of products that goes beyond a coherent set of propositions. For instance, two of the most important features of Townsend's theory are its measure and the survey from which the data animating the measure is taken. It is more appropriate to classify these two products as tools rather than propositions. Moreover, I am claiming that part of Townsend's theory also consists of a description of the activities or practices that led to producing these tools and the results for his analysis.

This is why a third sense of systematicity is in place. This sense is found in the literature in the philosophy of science that places particular emphasis on the practical aspects of science and strives to elucidate them. I am referring to a specific account of scientific measurement.

2.1.3. It fits in CRP measurement theory

The third sense of systematicity is provided by CRP, the measurement theory developed by Bradburn, Cartwright, and Fuller (Bradburn *et al.*, 2017). According to CRP, a good measure of the concept of interest has three elements: a precisification of the concept – that is, a conception of it; hypotheses about this conception and how it relates to other concepts; and a way to represent the conception and procedures to gather the relevant data to test these hypotheses. Additionally, it includes arguments showing that these three elements are in the right connection and it may also provide an explanation (the causes) of the relevant phenomenon that connects these three elements with a broad-range theory.

A measure according to CRP can be understood as a middle-range theory (Cartwright, 2020b: 278-285). Hence, I argue that Townsend's theory of poverty is a middle-range theory

whose core aligns well with CRP. Townsend's theory concentrates on one social phenomenon – poverty – and provides a set of interrelated elements in its favor, among which the cut-off measure is just one:

- a *conception* of it – relative deprivation caused by lack of resources;
- *hypotheses* concerning the elements of this conception – for instance, the point of disproportion hypothesis;
- *anthropological observations* that motivate his conception – for instance, that people have a basic need for social integration;
- a *representation* to test these hypotheses – the cut-off measure;
- *procedures* to build the measure – how to, *inter alia*, build a survey that measures resources appropriately;
- an *explanation* that connects it with a broad-range theory – poverty is one of the effects of a broader phenomenon, that is, the diverse forms of social stratification, which in turn are explained by a class-based, materialistic theory. More precisely, poverty is primarily the result of inequality in how resources are distributed and how they are reinforced by social beliefs about poverty;
- a *record* of the process by which the research was conducted – for instance, the description of how the survey with the British population was put into practice;
- and the theory's *policy prescriptions* – for instance, a substantial reduction in top salaries or wages.

Now, let us look at CRP with more detail, discussing its three elements and how they can support each other. This will make easier to understand the different elements in Townsend's theory and how they interrelate.

2.2. A measurement theory: CRP

In the philosophy of measurement and in metrology, the science of measurement, we find different theories that aim to describe and regulate measurement across different disciplines or to address different aspects of this activity. In this section, I introduce a theory particularly suited to the social sciences: the measurement theory developed by Norman Bradburn, Nancy Cartwright, and Jonathan Fuller (Bradburn *et al.*, 2017). This theory is especially relevant for understanding

poverty measurement more generally and Townsend's cut-off measure and his broader theory in particular.

Before continuing, it is worth asking: what does measurement in the social sciences entail? Peter Adcock and David Collier's (2001) reference work on social science measurement provides some help here. They describe measurement as a set of complex decisions ultimately linking concepts to observations. This linking process is often described as one about *measurement validity*, which in their words consists of answering the question: "Do the observations meaningfully capture the ideas contained in the concepts?" (Adcock & Collier, 2001: 530). In the next chapters, I will delve deeper into the basic idea that Townsend thought an adequate measure of a concept like poverty involves making and justifying choices. In fact, a key concept in social science measurement, *validation*, refers to this process. Validation consists of providing arguments for the conception, representation, and procedures used to produce the measure results, as well as for the consistency of these elements. One of the advantages of CRP theory is that it offers a useful framework for understanding this process by making it more explicit.

Let me repeat what, according to the CRP (Bradburn *et al.*, 2017: 73-74), good measurement involves. First, it involves the following activities:

- ***Conceptualization*:** providing a *conception* of the concept to be measured;[6]
- ***Representation:*** providing a formal *representation* of it, that is, the formal features that capture the features of the concept;
- **Formulating *procedures*:** providing *rules* for applying the representation to the measurement scores or results.

Second, good measurement involves providing arguments for why the chosen conception, representation, and procedures are *adequate* and in the *right relationship* with each other. In what follows below, these points will become clearer as we talk about each element in some detail, illustrating them with important choices in poverty measurement. I will also answer a possible objection to adopting CRP as my parameter for interpreting Townsend's theory.

[6] What I call "conception," Bradburn, Cartwright, and Fuller call "characterization." I stick with the former term as it is extensively deployed in the literature on poverty measurement.

2.2.1. Conceptualization

CRP emphasizes that many concepts animating measures in the social sciences often are what the Austrian philosopher Otto Neurath called *Ballung concepts*.[7] These concepts are used as typical currency in everyday speech and different, sometimes disparate, meanings are attributed to them. This means they are often connected only by family resemblance and have fuzzy boundaries, where we do not know whether it refers to a given object or not. To feature in scientific theories and animate measures, a *Ballung* concept needs to be *precisified*. We need to get rid of its many meanings, settle their boundaries, and determine precisely what things in the world belong to it and what do not. This involves specifying its intension and narrowing down its extensionality. More importantly, it is essential to make these aspects explicit to our interlocutors to avoid misunderstandings. All these activities correspond to conceptualization, and its result is a *conception* of a given concept.

Choosing poverty's basal space is also an instance of conceptualization, as it entails narrowing down poverty's extension by changing its intension. A possible result of conceptualization is the revision of the *Ballung* concept's folk meaning and folk extension. This means the meaning of the revised scientific concept may differ from the meaning attributed by non-experts to it and may differ from the list of things that are taken to fall under the concept too.

Let me give an interesting example of this. Consider William of Ockham, an English philosopher and Franciscan who lived in the late Middle Ages. In accordance with Francis of Assisi, Ockham embraced apologetic poverty, that is, a life voluntarily deprived of any kind of property, living as a "mendicant." [8] Now, remember that the capability approach makes room for people's choices to not achieve basic functionings. This means that according to poverty as capability deprivation, Ockham and Franciscans alike are not considered to be in poverty. Of course, one interpretation of poverty found in common speech refers to this kind of apologetic poverty. However, people like Sen have reasons to work with a revised conception of poverty that

[7] While *Ballung* concepts are not exclusive to the social sciences, they are certainly more prevalent there than in hard sciences, like mathematics or physics.

[8] Ockham's choice for apologetic poverty somewhat resonates with Francis' Testament, where one reads: "Those who embraced this life gave everything they had to the poor. They were satisfied with one habit which was patched inside and outside, and a cord, and trousers. We refused to have anything more." Furthermore, Ockham's preference for a life of simplicity mirrors the parsimony of his ontological approach, translated into the razor named after him. Whether this parallel is coincidental or deliberate is something to check.

does not include cases like Ockham's. These motives are related to the purposes that typically animate Sen and his followers' work, such as to enable a normative evaluation of social states that pays attention to people's agency. As a consequence, deprivations that result from someone's own choices should not, *ceteris paribus*, concern us from the point of view of social policy.[9]

Townsend's own revisionary conception of poverty will be discussed later (***Section 3.1***). Now, let us talk about representation.

2.2.2. Representation

We should also specify the features of the formal entity that is taken to appropriately represent the thing to be measured, in our case, the chosen conception of poverty. This formal entity is commonly called a "*measure*" of the quantity of the conception to be measured. A lot of debates in poverty measurement concern what features an adequate representation of it should reflect.

A basic representational choice concerns determining the appropriate operations that we can perform with the measure. This translates into establishing the *appropriate metric system* or *scale* of the measure. The most famous scale classification is from Stevens (1946), which divided them into *nominal*, *ordinal*, *interval*, and *ratio scales*. While the first two do not allow us to make any mathematical operation, interval scales allow us to add or subtract our results, and the ratio scale allows us to add, subtract, divide, and multiply. For instance, income is most often measured on a ratio scale and if we take it as our indicator of poverty, then we can perform the four operations with the results of such a measure.

In the case of poverty, another important representational choice consists of whether our measure of poverty refers to a continuous or binary variable. This problem can help us seeing how representation is linked to conceptualization. If we conceive poverty as a matter of yes or no, then we should conceive it as a kind of binary variable, otherwise, it will be an invalid measure. In fact, we can interpret Soares' claim that we mentioned in the last chapter (***Section 1.1***) as stating that the problem of setting a poverty line in a non-arbitrary way rests on the features he attributed to

[9] If we agree with Baujard and Gilardone's (2017) argument (note 47 in ***Chapter 1***), we can claim that Sen has developed the capability approach with a revisionist goal in mind: to offer an alternative to welfare economics' almost exclusive focus on well-being or utility as the basis for evaluating social states.

the conception of poverty as well-being deprivation. Soares claimed that given well-being is a continuous variable and poverty binary (so, someone is or is not poor, period), then we could trace the poverty line not in accordance with well-being but only in accordance with political or moral criteria. Of course, we have mentioned that one can dispute this simply by denying that poverty is binary or well-being is continuous. Also, we could argue that it is indeed possible to establish meaningful statistical relationships between a continuous variable and a discrete variable. The important thing to note is that, according to CRP, in a good measure, such choices are not taken for granted but are objects of argumentation too.

Keep in mind that the process of offering arguments to support the elements of a measure and to ensure their consistency is validating a measure. I should note that we find two main different ways of doing so in poverty measurement: one that is *formal* and the other *empirical*. Formal validation consists of providing proofs of representational theorems. This is typical of what the literature calls "*axiomatic poverty measures*." [10] These measures are designed to satisfy certain mathematical properties that are taken as *axioms*. These axioms refer to the structure of the measure and how it will respond to changes in its arguments. Among these axioms, the most important have normative interpretations. For instance, the monotonicity axiom states that "Given other things, a reduction in income of a person below the poverty line must increase the poverty measure" (Sen, 1976: 219). Another, the transfer axiom, states that "Given other things, a pure transfer of income from a person below the poverty line to anyone who is richer must increase the poverty measure" (Sen, 1976: 219). The motivation for both axioms was to ensure that the measure is sensitive to a transfer of income from the poorest poor to those who are better off. Here, the measure is not validated empirically, but deductively.

This deductive validation of axiomatic measures is quite different in spirit from how Townsend argues for the way he represents poverty. He favored empirical validation, that is, basing a choice about a poverty measure on empirical evidence. This was the case of how he argued the poverty line should be determined: based on a hypothesis about the elements of his

[10] The so-called "axiomatic method" was introduced by Sen in the seminal "Poverty: An Ordinal Approach to Measurement" (1976). Its most notable measures include the family of poverty indicators called '*FGT*," named after Foster, Greer, and Thorbecke, which proved this family of indicators satisfies a set of axioms taken as normatively desirable (Foster *et al.*, 1984). For a detailed account of this method, see Alkire *et al.* (2015: esp. 109-122).

conception, that is, the point in the resources scale where relative deprivation becomes disproportionate. In the case of positive test results, the line would be validated.

2.2.3. Procedures

Finally, we need rules for applying the measure to the observations. In fact, these observations serve as inputs to the measure. More concretely, these rules state how the values of our poverty measure should be collected and processed. This process of application has three steps: (a) data collection, (b) processing, and (c) checking reliability. Let us see each in turn.

a) Data collection

It relates to how the relevant data is collected and registered by the researcher. For most poverty measures, the first step is carried out through household surveys. These surveys are the building bricks of quantitative social research. The most important tool here is the questionnaire, which contains the questions that a person must answer about the conditions of their household.[11] A well-known issue for social researchers is that hardly ever the person who runs the analysis (that is, who performs the steps b and c) is the one who designs and supervises the survey. The data that animates the analysis is most commonly the result of census or sample research conducted by official public institutions like the *Federal Statistical System of the United States* or the *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* ["Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics"]. For most of his career, Townsend made use of secondary data. But, as we shall see, the results of PITUK were peculiar in this sense, as they were the result of a nationally representative survey designed and conducted by him and his associates.[12]

b) Processing

Here we are referring to how a measure processes its relevant data. This activity of processing is often called "scoring," or simply "counting the cases" of the conception of interest.

[11] From the perspective of economics, Deaton's (2015) work is a reference for working with data from household surveys for various purposes. Atkinson (2019) discusses and offers practical guidance related to data associated with poverty measurement.
[12] I thank Chris Renwick for bringing this to my attention.

The scores constitute elements of a measure that are, so to speak, most closely related to the data. It is in that sense that Adcock and Collier write that "[v]alid measurement is achieved when scores … meaningfully capture the ideas contained in the corresponding concept [more precisely, conception] (2001: 530).

In a good measure, the steps taken in scoring the cases are transparent and well-argued. How could a poverty measure's score be well-argued? To illustrate, imagine we view poverty as multidimensional, comprising various kinds of deprivations. Take, for example, five distinct kinds of deprivation. If our measure includes one indicator *per* deprivation, a key question arises: How many indicators must a person meet to be classified as poor? Just one? All five? Or perhaps an intermediate number, like three? In the literature, the first option is often called the "*union criterion*;" the second the "*intersection criterion*;" and the third the "*intermediate criterion*" (see ***Table 2.1***).[13] If we consider poverty to be multidimensional, it might sound strange to regard a single indicator score as sufficient for classifying someone as poor, hence rejecting the union criterion. Therefore, we may regard no single indicator as sufficient. We may even adopt an intersection criterion; however, this procedure has rarely been adopted in the literature (Alkire *et al.*, 2015: 124). Actually, for those who claim that no single indicator can do justice to the multidimensional character of poverty, the most popular procedure involves taking more than one but less than all indicators, hence the intermediate criterion (Alkire *et al.*, 2015: 33).

Table 2 **Multidimensional counting criteria. (**Author's own elaboration.**)**

Number of dimensions to be in poverty		
Union	**Intermediate**	**Intersection**
One indicator	More than one but less than all	All indicators

It may be worthwhile to explore how we could argue for the inadequacy of the union criterion. First, we could consider what would be more adequate given our conception of poverty. *Prima facie*, a valid measure of a multidimensional conception may require multiple indicators. However, the relationship between indicators of a conception and the conception itself is less

[13] For an in-depth review of different ways of counting deprivations and their basic rationale, see Alkire *et al.* (2015: ch. 4).

straightforward. Take, for example, a glycemic blood test for diabetes: it does not encompass all dimensions of the disease, yet this does not render it invalid. As mentioned above, it is not impossible for a single indicator to be an adequate proxy of a multidimensional basal space (***Section 1.2.2***). In fact, it is this rationale that underpins the main arguments for income-based measures of poverty. However, we have also seen how arguments for multiple indicators of poverty stem from an empirical observation: relying solely on an individual's income can cause us to lose track of individuals who suffer from non-income but poverty-related deprivations.[14] In a nutshell, one could argue that the best reasons for considering single indicators as insufficient measures of a multidimensional conception of poverty are those that appeal to both conceptual arguments and empirical evidence.

In any case, clearly stating and motivating such processing rules is vital, especially in multidimensional poverty. Chapter 4 will deal with Townsend's rules for counting the several indicators of deprivation in his measure of poverty. Now, let us talk about the last step of application.

c) Checking reliability

This concerns what statistical tests will be performed to ensure that a measure's result is reliable. I follow Alkire *et al.* (2015: ch. 8) in their account of this matter, and by "reliable" here I mean both reliable and *robust*. A measure is robust when its results are not too sensitive to small changes in its features, like where the poverty line is settled – to be more precise, when its results are not too sensitive to small changes in its parameters. We have mentioned above that reflecting on poverty measurement is important because our conclusions about the state of poverty in a given population can differ depending on the poverty line we deploy. Also, the people who are selected for policies to relieve or overcome their poverty may be different too, depending on the line. While these differences can reflect substantive debates about the matter, it may be undesirable to have

[14] We could also further support the notion that a single indicator is insufficient on a more explanatory basis. That is, we may assess an indicator by its ability to identify the most significant cause of the phenomenon under consideration. Within Townsend's theory, this would mean that our focus shifts from his index of deprivation to his index of total resources. After all, it is the latter that would allow him to capture only those relative deprivations that are caused by a lack of resources. Indeed, Townsend's inclusion of indicators of resources that go beyond income was driven by the putative lack of explanatory power of previous indicators for understanding the full scope of relative deprivation. This is the topic of ***Section 3.1.2***.

our measure's results sensitive to small changes in its parameters. For instance, this might make it difficult to ascertain whether changes in poverty levels are due to economic conditions or merely due to fine adjustments in the measurement. Of course, it may be hard to distinguish when differences in results in poverty measurement are a question of robustness or of substantive judgment. Here, we may need to debate directly about some of our conceptualization and representational choices.

And reliability? Well, here means, broadly, ensuring that the results of the measure allow us to draw conclusions about the whole population being studied, and not only about those people who took the survey. For instance, most often poverty data is gathered through sample surveys rather than a complete census. Thus, Townsend drew upon statistical inferences when he concluded things about poverty in the whole UK based on a survey conducted only on a subset of its population. So, we need to acknowledge the risk of the sample does not represent the entire population. In fact, Townsend did strive for checking how certain they were about its results.[15]

Discussing reliability and robustness appropriately would require a more thorough discussion of statistics. Eventually, we could further discuss whether and when we should interpret a survey's results in causal terms. However, delving into these topics would extend the length of this thesis significantly. Therefore, I have chosen not to include them, trusting that their absence will not undermine the strength of my argument.

2.2.4. A possible objection and an answer

One might claim that interpreting Townsend's measure according to one specific theory like CRP can be undesirable, as it would make the interpretation dependent on CRP being the right measurement theory. Here as elsewhere, one finds in the philosophy of measurement several theories about the same object.[16] For instance, there is some debate about what metaphysical attitude we should adopt over the nature of the concepts that guide what we intend to measure. Should we take these concepts as referring to *real* entities (whatever "real" might mean) and which the measure should be able to capture; or are they just *tools* through which we organize our

[15] As we shall see (***Section 4.3.3***), reliability also applies to other elements of the survey, like its questionnaire.
[16] For a comprehensive review, see Tal (2015). For a measurement theory aimed to be applicable to different sciences, see Mari *et al.* (2021).

language, and with our measure we only aim to produce results that allow us to satisfy certain purposes? Some measurement theories may be compatible with the former, but not with the latter option, and vice-versa.

What is the case of Townsend's view about these matters? To answer, take this passage for a moment:

> … [T]he importance of scientific definition and assessment must not be underestimated. I doubt whether reality should be regarded fundamentally as what people make of it. This is to confuse consciousness with the external construction of events. A distinction has to be made between subjective perceptions and objective structures and relationships, even when knowledge of that external reality is necessarily filtered through human perceptions. (Townsend, 1987b: 32)

Townsend is expressing what we might call a "realist" view about poverty. However, it is well beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss issues related to the ontology of poverty, either according to Townsend's or other theories. Fortunately, I believe this same passage can be interpreted differently, as an epistemic statement about how we should investigate poverty and assess our views about it. Whatever we and Townsend might mean by "real," it is a fact that his main concerns rested on discussing how poverty should be investigated and how we should assess the different views on the matter. Thus, his focus is on ensuring that a theory is *epistemically sound*, not on asserting that it is *true*. In fact, CRP is arguably compatible with different views regarding the ontology of measurement, but it is certainly more focused on providing a framework to address epistemic concerns – such as ensuring that a measure is systematic.

2.3. A note on my primary source: *Poverty in the United Kingdom*

Before exploring the key elements of Townsend's theory, it is important to note that my principal source for his theory on poverty is his *magnum opus* of 1979, *Poverty in the United Kingdom*. While it is true that throughout the 1980s Townsend refined his theory – something that can be traced in his paper "Deprivation" (1987a) and further in another monograph dedicated to poverty (Townsend, 1993) –, PITUK is not only his most cited work but also an "apotheosis of an intellectual development" that began not with him but with Richard Titmuss' work, the pioneer

social policy researcher and his mentor (Wedderburn, 1981: 274; Lund, 1981: 257).[17] Furthermore, we will discuss in the ***Conclusion*** that it was PITUK that established the so-called "*scientific*" or "*statistical approach*" to measuring poverty. This approach is grounded in Townsend's conception of poverty and his emphasis on epistemic values as a guide for measurement, while also incorporating modern statistical techniques not available at the time of PITUK to enhance its methodology.

Thus, it is not surprising that, for the most part, sorting out his theory consists of sorting out the concepts and rationale that occupy the already mentioned paragraph of PITUK:

> Poverty can be defined objectively and applied consistently only in terms of the concept of relative deprivation. That is the theme of this book. The term is understood objectively rather than subjectively. Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or are at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities. (Townsend, 1979: 31)

It is only this conception of poverty as relative deprivation that is, in Townsend's sense, objective, and an objective measure of poverty is one that operationalizes it. What is often called "*Townsend's measure of poverty*" regards the point of disproportion hypothesis. This is a hypothesized cut-off in a society's scale of resource distribution below which someone's participation in society's standard of living (poverty's basal space) diminishes disproportionately or, to put it differently, is "excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs, and activities." This cut-off would offer a non-arbitrary – in Townsend's words, "objective" way – to settle the line below which families or individuals would be in poverty. Like any hypothesis, it could be tested, and it may be that no adequate evidence will be found in its favor. In any case, in this way the measure is guided by "an external criterion of evaluation" (1979: 38), that is, it would satisfy the epistemic value of testability.

[17] Richard Titmuss (1907-1973) was a social researcher and the founder of the field called at his time "social administration" (now "social policy"). He also served as the founding chair of Social Policy at the LSE.

Townsend then contrasts this measure with three other measures, or "standards" of poverty. These are the *state* or *official standard* (or the *administrative measures*); the *relative income standard*; and the *deprivation standard*, which is given by his index of relative deprivation. The first two are as popular in poverty research and public policy as they are "subjective," meaning they are influenced by non-epistemic, contextual values influencing poverty research. The third is objective as it is based on an objective conception of deprivation, that is, relative deprivation. However, it is not a measure of poverty, as it lacks a line that separates those who are disproportionately deprived from those who are not. In any case – and somewhat unexpectedly –, we shall see in ***Chapter 4*** how Townsend utilized not only the cutoff measure but all four measures in his analysis of poverty in the UK.

It is with these points in mind that we should read the next chapters.

Conclusion

We have sorted out in what sense Townsend's theory of poverty can be regarded as systematic. The theory aims to distinguish itself from commonsensical knowledge in typical scientific dimensions, like epistemic connectedness, completeness (or unification), comprehensiveness, as well as exhibiting descriptive, explanatory, and predictive power. Also, I argue that Townsend's is a middle-range theory of poverty, as it is concerned with a specific phenomenon and it makes possible connecting broad-range theories with empirical data. In this way, the theory exhibits systematicity as it enhances unification. Finally, the way he developed his cut-off measure of poverty aligns well with CRP measurement theory. In accordance with CRP, we shall see that he provides arguments for his choices over each element of the measure, as well as for these elements being in the correct relationship. Thus, the measure would exhibit enhanced performance in the dimensions of defending knowledge claims and epistemic connectedness.

These are only enunciations that Townsend's theory is systematic in these three senses. I need to show his distinctiveness from commonsensical knowledge, its capability of linking broad-range theorizing with empirical data, as well as how it fits well with CRP. This is what the next three chapters will do, by dealing with specific elements of the theory: its conception, how it represents it, what steps it takes to gather the relevant data, and its explanation. We will start with Townsend's conception of poverty.

CHAPTER 3

The Conception of Poverty as Relative Deprivation by Lack of Resources

Introduction

I have mentioned that sorting out Townsend's theory of poverty largely involves analyzing the concepts and rationales presented in the opening paragraph of PITUK. Let us take a look at it once more:

> Poverty can be defined objectively and applied consistently only in terms of the concept of relative deprivation. That is the theme of this book. The term is understood objectively rather than subjectively. Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or are at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities. (Townsend, 1979: 31)

But now, let us add the sentence that immediately follows it: "The consequences of adopting this definition will be illustrated to bring out its meaning" (Townsend, 1979: 31). In this chapter, my goal is to "bring out" the meaning of Townsend's conception of poverty. Doing so translates into discussing the elements that constitute the most basic elements of the theory. These are Townsend's conception of poverty, the hypotheses and anthropological observations that aid in understanding this conception, as well as the reasons for preferring it over its alternatives. His conception of poverty can be interpreted as a product of his main critiques directed towards conventional conceptions of it, mainly the conception that poverty is related to subsistence. This is why it really helps to contrast his with Sen's conception. Indeed, an important aspect of this presentation will involve exploring the following dialectic: highlighting how Townsend's conception of poverty diverges from its primary alternatives.

We will start with the conception of poverty. *Poverty is relative deprivation caused by a lack of resources*. Thus, the conception has two elements. One is *relative deprivation*, namely, deprivation from society's standard of living. We will see that to be relatively deprived is to be deprived of a basic need that is a social need. Relative deprivation is also relative to a society's time and space. Further, I will show in what sense poverty refers to objective rather than subjective

relative deprivation. The other element is *resources*. Poverty is a specific kind of relative deprivation, one that is caused by a lack of resources. In the theory, the conception of resources is broadened to include kinds that are different from income. Thus, in our search for the causes of poverty, we should look not only at those systems that distribute income but also at a variety of systems that distribute other kinds of resources in a society. The upshot is that both relative deprivation and resources are multidimensional.

Then, we will look at the hypotheses about the conception of poverty and the anthropological observations that motivate it. The hypotheses establish functional relationships between the elements of poverty (for instance, between resources and relative deprivation). Among these, the most well-known is the point of disproportion, which states that there is a point in the resource distribution where relative deprivation increases disproportionately. It is there, Townsend argues, that the poverty line should be drawn. Some hypotheses also provide functional relationships between these elements and broader social phenomena (for instance, between the official standard of measuring poverty and the level given by the point of disproportion).

The anthropological observations explain some of the aggregate-level relationships that are the object of hypotheses like the point of disproportion, by establishing the causes of these relationships at the level of people's actions. Other anthropological observations are provided as reasons in favor of Townsend's conception. For instance, to support the idea of considering social needs as basic needs too, he claims that the need for social integration is given by transcultural anthropological observation. All of these intend to align his conception of poverty with his preferred epistemic values.

Nevertheless, one might still argue that Townsend's choice of the standard of living as poverty's deprivation space is indeed a contextual judgment, thus challenging his pursuit of value-freedom. This objection will be explored in some detail in the middle of the chapter.

***

Sections' outline

Section 3.1 provides an in-depth discussion of Townsend's conception of poverty, including its two elements – relative deprivation and resources –, the objection that his conceptualization involves a contextual judgment, and in what sense both elements are multidimensional. Then, ***Section 3.2*** presents and discusses the hypotheses and anthropological

observations that are related to the elements of the conception and that relate these elements to other social phenomena.

3.1. Conception of poverty

We can state Townsend's conception of poverty in the following way:

- *Conception: Poverty is relative deprivation caused by lack of resources.*

The objective of this section is to unpack this conceptualization by discussing its two main elements: *relative deprivation* and *resources*. They are the core of Townsend's theory. As we have seen in ***Chapter 2***, we must understand these elements as precisifying poverty, that is, determining what poverty is and distinguishing it from what it is not. We will make a brief detour to the objection that his choice for the standard of living as poverty's deprivation space is a contextual judgment. After discussing these, we will briefly point out the *multidimensional character* of both the standard of living and resources.

3.1.1. Relative deprivation

Relative deprivation concerns Townsend's precisification of the kind of deprivation he takes poverty to be, that is, his poverty's basal space. To put it roughly, relative deprivation concerns deprivation from a *society's standard of living*. In the broadest terms, a standard of living is "the set of customs and activities which they are expected to share or in which they are expected to join" (1979: 54). In a different place, he writes that being relatively deprived is to be deprived of "the types of diet, [to not] participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or are at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong" (1979: 31). In both quotations, "they" refers to individuals, families, and groups that belong to a given society.

Townsend also employs "style of living" as a synonym for "standard of living" – but not always. This might create some confusion, as in common speech style of living often refers to the activities and living conditions of *particular people* or *groups* in a given society. Actually, as Townsend himself notes, in the same society one can find different styles of living, or "gradations" and "different mixes" of local styles for different regions, communities, classes, racial groups, religions, and occupations (1979: 58-59). To be precise, Townsend rejects the existence of a

"unitary and clear-cut 'style of living'" within a single society but argues that there is one style of living that is expected to be followed by a *majority* of a national population (1979: 259). This is an important part of his theory, as 1970's Britain was already a multicultural society. Diverse as it is, however, for Townsend it makes sense to talk about a majority's style. Henceforth, unless otherwise specified, by "standard of living," I shall refer to a society's style of living or to the majority's style of living.

Accordingly, we can restate his conceptualization as follows:

- *Conception*: Poverty is deprivation from a society's standard of living caused by lack of resources.*

Now, let us discuss three features of Townsend's notion of relative deprivation that are pivotal in understanding his theory: a) *Social needs* are basic needs too; b) Deprivation is always relative to each *society* and its *specific time*; c) Poverty concerns *objective* relative deprivation. These features correspond to a new degree in Townsend's process of conceptualizing the concept of relative deprivation. Following this, I will address a critical point: d) The objection that Townsend's selection of relative deprivation as poverty's basal space *relies on contextual judgments*, which potentially contradicts his pursuit of value-freedom.

a) Social needs and relative deprivation

The first feature concerns the relation of poverty's basal space and the notion of *needs*. I have said that it is often unnoticed that Townsend belongs to an old tradition that regards poverty as a matter of needs. We have seen how this tradition goes back at least to the subsistence approach (***Section 1.3.2***). Needs here refers to physiological needs – mainly food. The core of the subsistence approach is to claim that these needs are basic in the sense of being necessary for a subject's physiological efficiency or freedom from illness.[1] Though belonging to this tradition, however, Townsend's understanding of human needs differs in important ways from the subsistence approach.

[1] Let us remember that other researchers (like Rocha, 2006) deploy the term "basic needs" to refer to the approach in the social indicators' tradition, which considers far more needs as basic than just physiological ones (***Section 1.3.4***).

The first feature of Townsend's relative deprivation conception is that his notion expands the list of needs that are considered basic. Here, Townsend draws upon what he takes to be a fundamental feature of human beings: that beyond physiological needs, *social* needs are basic too. He notes that this is an observation that has been made since at least the 18th Century, most notably (but not only) by Adam Smith (***Section 1.4***). However, in theorists like Smith, Townsend argues that "the implications and applications [of this observation] do not appear to have been spelled out systematically and in detail" (1979: 32) – a gap his approach aims to address.

These needs relate to our social character, that is, to our drive for integrating into different kinds of groups – familial, regional, national, and global. This integration should be understood as *participating in* or as *being part of* these groups. Townsend defines the elements that constitute these groups both materially – "diets," "living conditions and amenities" – and non-materially – "customs" and "activities." So, a much wider set of goods is considered basic for Townsend, such as a society's typical garments, house furniture, objects of symbolic value like family pictures, child toys; an amenable environment, including health in terms of temperature, comfort, and appearance; and more. Beyond a set of goods, a society's typical activities are also considered basic, such as: going to restaurants, bars, or the movies; attending communal meetings; participating in holiday parties and trips to meet distant family members; children and young people attending schools, etc.

More recently, the World Bank has developed a poverty measure based on the recognition of the importance of social needs. Its designers, Chen and Ravallion (2011), developed it for application in medium- and high-income countries. The idea is that poverty measurement should be sensitive to the fact that the costs of social inclusion are relative to a country's economic development. As a country becomes wealthier, the costs increase, and the poverty line should rise accordingly.[2] However, this measure does not replace but only complements the IPL, which is still considered the most suitable for poor countries. In that sense, as Chen and Ravallion recognize, it is assumed that there is a part of poverty that is not relative but absolute.

[2] More precisely, the "weakly relative poverty line" (as they call it) does *not* rise *proportionally* with a country's average income. If it did, a uniform increase in income across the board would leave the extent of poverty unchanged. Differently, with the weakly relative line, if all income levels increase at an equal rate, the poverty rate will actually decrease (Ravallion, 2016: 212-213).

It can be argued that Townsend would still believe that this does not take the anthropological observation about the social character of human needs seriously. To fully understand this, we need to explore the extent to which Townsend's conception of relative deprivation is, if you will excuse the redundancy, relative.

b) The relativity of relative deprivation

The second feature concerns the relative character of relative deprivation itself. For Townsend, what is taken as a basic (physiological or social) need is relative to a given society and to the changes this society endures. For instance, since Rowntree had endeavored his first study in York until the 1970s, British society has changed in a variety of ways. According to Townsend, there was increased stratification, developed division of labor, and growth of powerful new organizations (1979: 915-917). All these contributed to changes in existing needs and the emergence of new kinds of needs.[3]

By taking poverty's basal space as relative, Townsend is distinguishing himself from the view that poverty does not vary *according to a given society* nor to the *changes the same society endures*. Such invariance regarding time and place is often understood as taking poverty to be *absolute*. Following Atkinson (2019: 52-54), this invariance can be applied to two elements in a poverty's measure:

- **Absolute basal space:** for all times and all societies, poverty's basal space is the same.
- **Absolute poverty line:** for all times and all societies, the poverty line is the same.

Different combinations are possible here. So, it is important to be clear in what sense one takes poverty to be absolute (if in terms of society and/or its time), and regarding which of its elements (if in terms of its basal space and/or its line). For instance, some researchers take the World Bank's IPL as based on an absolute, in time and place, conception of poverty. According

[3] Here, Townsend is also building upon the framework of his and Abel-Smith's mentor, Richard Titmuss (see note 17 in ***Chapter 2***). Chris Renwick notes (2023: 16) that Titmuss' influence on Townsend may also be found more profoundly in his criticism that both academia and, more importantly, state capacity were not keeping pace with the changing social needs resulting from the social development that post-war Britain had undergone. One can almost hear Townsend speaking in Titmuss' "Social Administration in a Changing Society" (1951). For more about Townsend and Abel-Smith's work with Titmuss, see Renwick (2023).

to this interpretation, in the IPL, poverty is taken to be deprivation from physiological needs for all countries in the world, and at all times.[4]

Another notable kind of absolute view about poverty's basal space takes poverty to be *only* subsistence deprivation. Which means that at all times and all societies, to be poor is to be deprived only in such a way.[5] A different view claims that while at all times and all societies subsistence deprivation is poverty, this does not exhaust poverty's basal space. Accordingly, in societies with higher levels of development, where subsistence poverty has been eliminated, there may still be forms of poverty. This last view was vindicated by Sen (1981). In its favor, Sen makes these comments about Townsend's relative deprivation approach:

> It is, however, worth noting that the approach of relative deprivation – even including all its variants – cannot really be the only basis for the concept of poverty. A famine, for example, will be readily accepted as a case of acute poverty no matter what the relative pattern within the society happens to be. Indeed, there is an irreducible core of absolute deprivation in our idea of poverty, which translates reports of starvation, malnutrition and visible hardship into a diagnosis of poverty without having to ascertain first the relative picture. Thus the approach of relative deprivation supplements rather than supplants the analysis of poverty in terms of absolute dispossession. (Sen, 1981: 17)

To sum up, Sen vindicated an *absolute core* of poverty. This core can be interpreted as absolute both in terms of the basal space and the poverty line, as well as absolute according to the time and space of the corresponding space and line. But Sen also claimed that the relative deprivation approach *complements* this core, because humans are "social animals" with social needs *too* (1981: 15).

In a series of works published in the *Oxford Economic Papers*, Sen and Townsend sharply disagreed on the merits and limitations of an array of poverty-related themes, but over and above

---

[4] The World Bank's IPL adopts an absolute poverty threshold in the sense of being virtually applicable to all countries in the world. However, when it comes to its time dimension, we have observed that its poverty line has been updated sometimes since its initial calculation in the 1990s (see note 6 in this thesis' ***Introduction***). These updates are not periodical, and in years without updates, the poverty line certainly fails to capture changes in prices or a country's economic growth. This suggests that the poverty line can also be considered absolute in the time's sense. I called it "virtually" applicable to all countries because, in practice, the Bank's calculations often are restricted to low-income or middle-income countries (Ferreira *et al.*, 2016: 144-145).

[5] In that sense, absolute poverty is often considered synonymous with extreme poverty or "indigence" (see note 34 in ***Chapter 1***). This also aligns with Rowntree's concept of primary poverty (***Section 1.3.2***).

about the existence, meaning, and implications of this "absolute core." [6] Townsend's dissatisfaction lies in the word "too," as he denies this complementarity and argues that even if reduced to this core, the "absolutist" view is a non-starter. In this debate, Townsend largely reiterated arguments presented in some of his previous papers and books. One of these arguments relates to the relativity of social deprivation.

Townsend contends that the concept of an absolute core of poverty, particularly when it is interpreted as encompassing only physiological needs, is spurious. As mentioned earlier, he believes that even needs related to starvation, nutrition, and visible hardship are socially determined. To illustrate this point, consider the need for shelter. It is reasonable to say that this need is basic in a similar way as the need for food is basic. However, is shelter absolute in Sen's sense? Townsend asserts that it is not. After all, Townsend has previously stated that shelter encompasses various social notions (***Section 1.4***), including "privacy, space to cook and work and play and highly cultured notions of warmth, humidity, and segregation of particular members of family and different functions of sleep, cooking, washing and excretion" (Townsend, 1985a: 667).

But suppose we regard shelter as somewhat less essential than the need for food. We would then need to argue that even the need for food is relative. In fact, Townsend does this, thereby challenging any absolute core in the notion of poverty. He identifies three aspects in which food needs would be relative: ***(i)*** the relativity in *energy requirements* – relative to physical activity, sex, gender etc. –; ***(ii)*** the relativity of food *items* –; and ***(iii)*** the relativity in the *Engel coefficient*. In all, relativity here concerns a society's custom or a society's standard of living. Let us talk about each of them in turn.

(i) Townsend criticized Rowntree's minimum standard for not accommodating variations in caloric requirements based on individual characteristics. He noted that estimates of nutrient requirements were broad averages, not adjusted for age, family composition, occupation, or activity level outside work (Townsend, 1979: 34). Indeed, this relativity is acknowledged by one of the most authoritative benchmarks for minimum energy requirements found in the literature: the minimum standard set by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

[6] Sen's paper "Poor, Relatively Speaking" (1983) was followed by Townsend's reply: "A sociological approach to the measurement of poverty – A rejoinder to Professor Amartya Sen" (1985a). Sen's own reply "A Sociological Approach to the Measurement of Poverty: A Reply to Professor Peter Townsend" (1985) ended the interchange.

The FAO's minimum animates, until today, measures of poverty that follow the subsistence approach. It is based on the output of a 2001 panel of experts from FAO, the World Health Organization, and the United Nations University. In the panel, the experts calculated, first, the need for basic metabolism – that is, "the energy expended by the human body in a state of rest" – in order to support and maintain health and good nutrition (FAO *et al.*, 2014: 48). Second, they considered precisely those differences in sex and age, as well as a factor related to physical activity level. This factor is called the "*physical activity level*" (PAL) index. The panel assumes that their prescriptions are not for individuals but for "average energy requirements of *groups* or *classes* of individuals who have similar characteristics" (FAO, 2001: 2; original emphasis).[7] Thus, people's energy requirements are relative to such demographic and sociological features.

(ii) For Townsend, another reason for the relativity of food requirements concerns the selection of food items to achieve the nutritional minimum. Townsend argued that in the subsistence approach, these items were chosen for minimal cost rather than reflecting the diets typical among the working classes.[8] He regards this as an arbitrary procedure and illustrates his point by saying that a "family might maintain its physical efficiency just as well in a caravan … as in a three-bedroom house. It could go to bed early and spend nothing on electricity" (Townsend, 1962: 215). A selection that is being insensitive to dietary customs is unrealistic, to say the least.

Indeed, the need to select food items that respect dietary customs has long been recognized by economists.[9] In a seminal paper from the last century, "The Cost of Subsistence" (1945), the American economist George Stigler refers to the "physiological" and "cultural" components of people's diets. In a society like the US, Stigler argues, these components vary greatly based on "background, social position, and cultural values" – a variety in styles of living, one might say. For Stigler, this implies that making judgments about a nutritional minimum for an entire population is not reasonable (Stigler, 1945: 314). However, Townsend extends these observations,

---

[7] It should be noted that this energy requirement is explicitly normative. In the panel's report, one reads that its goal "is not meant merely to describe the energy expenditures and requirements of population groups. It intends to be *prescriptive*, in order to support and maintain health and good nutrition" (FAO, 2001: 2; original emphasis).

[8] In "The Meaning of Poverty," Townsend puts forward a poverty measure based on what commentators claimed is a healthy diet (Deeming, 2012). Such a measure is based solely on food needs, determining the minimum income required to maintain a healthy diet in accordance with a specific standard of living (Townsend, 1962: 220).

[9] Like the question on social needs (see note 58 in ***Chapter 1***), the problem of item selection was already noted by Adam Smith and other thinkers from the 18th Century (Smith, 1981 [1776]: 85-86; 870n1).

claiming that the only consistent approach is to acknowledge the full relativity of food needs to cultural factors.

(iii) The final reason for the relativity even of such a seemingly absolute core relates more to how the subsistence approach incorporates non-food items. Recall that Rowntree's poverty line of the 1930s included non-food items. Here, Townsend asserts, the problem lies with the Engel coefficient, namely, the proportion of food expenditure in Rowntree's calculation of spendings in non-food necessities. In Rowntree's poverty line, this coefficient was disproportionate compared to the "budgets and customs of life of ordinary people" (Townsend, 1979: 34). And by "ordinary people," Townsend means not only the poor, but the whole society.

Consider the measure of poverty adopted by Beveridge, which is based on Rowntree's data at 1938 prices. In this measure, the Engel coefficient employed for households in poverty was 58%, whereas estimates for families of the same size not in poverty were at 41% (Townsend, 1979: 34). For Townsend, this is arbitrary: we should not base our measure of poverty solely on the customs of the working class or on those in the lowest income decile. He argues that doing so overlooks the fact that individuals with lowest incomes are also encouraged and even demanded to live by the majority's standard of living. Furthermore, this majority's style includes not only people in poverty, but the style of living of the "rich" too, because:[10]

> the influence of national government, trading systems, education, the mass media, industry and transport systems will tend towards the establishment of diffuse cultural norms. Pakistanis in Bradford will tend or will be encouraged to adopt English habits of going away on summer holidays, patterns of child care, car-driving and travel, and patterns of consumption, even when they remain distinctive in other respects. Certain practices gradually become accepted as appropriate modes of behaviour, and even when a group performs particular rituals of religious observance or engages in particular leisure-time activity, it shares other customs with many different groups in society. (Townsend, 1979: 259)

Compare Townsend's argument with what we have just seen George Stigler claim. Stigler refutes the reasonableness of assuming an encompassing standard of living in societies like the US. This stands in stark contrast to one of the core tenets of Townsend's approach, which advocates for a majority's standard of living that is promoted across all classes. As I have said

[10] Townsend intentionally adopts the term "rich" (1979: 337).

before, I will not resolve these debates here. It suffices to mention that one of the most significant critiques of PITUK, as stated by Piachaud (1993 [1981]: 117-119), argues precisely this: in multicultural societies like the US and the UK, there is no such thing as a general standard of living, even if we understand it as a majority's standard.

Let us return to Sen's position in this debate. It should be recognized that Sen accounted for these three variations in food needs. After all, the capability approach heavily emphasizes the differences in people's abilities to convert food (or, more precisely, commodities) into nutrition and health. What, then, is the difference between him and Townsend?

Well, Sen maintains that his preferred poverty's basal space is not determined by these variations. To repeat, he famously stated that "poverty is an absolute notion in the space of capabilities but very often it will take a relative form in the space of commodities or characteristics" (Sen, 1983: 161). It does not matter at all at what time or society we are referring to; some *kinds* of basic capabilities – such as those related to nutrition and health – will always constitute the core of the concept of poverty. It may be the case that other capabilities may emerge in different societies, but they are merely this, artifacts of different societies. In this sense, Sen is an absolutist about poverty's basal space and a relativist about the means by which a person can achieve this space.

In fact, I propose this interpretation: that the crux of the disagreement between Sen and Townsend lies in poverty's basal space, rather than in its absolute or relative nature. Sen advocates for the superiority of basic capabilities in assessing a person's life and, consequently, in identifying those in poverty. Townsend, on the other hand, champions the standard of living as poverty's basal space.

Just recall what we observed when comparing Sen's and Townsend's approaches (***Section 1.4***). These two concepts, basic capabilities and standard of living, are related yet distinct. As mentioned earlier, Sen views the standard of living as an *achievement*, while basic capabilities are the *ability* to achieve (1987: 109-110). To put it differently, Sen sees poverty's basal space as deprivation of a particular kind of *opportunity* – the basic capability to choose among a special kind of *possible* states: functionings. Conversely, Townsend views poverty as deprivation of a special kind of *outcome* – a specific *actual* state, that is, participating in the conditions of life that are standard in society. It is not a coincidence that Sen repeatedly asserts that focusing solely on

outcomes, rather than the opportunity to achieve them, is a limitation of all needs-based approaches, including Townsend's (Sen, 1983: 162; 1992: 109).

We have also mentioned that capabilities and the standard of living also differ in their levels of abstraction. Capabilities refer, *inter alia*, to all possible standards of living someone can achieve. Furthermore, the standard of living is essentially a relative notion and, as such descriptively richer or thicker than that of capabilities. To describe a standard of living, we need to refer to a more detailed set of objects and practices specific to a given time and place. This is not the case for capabilities.

I believe it would be a modest yet significant advancement to frame this debate not in terms of the absolute or relative nature of poverty, but rather in terms of poverty's basal space.[11] This comes closer to what I take to be the core of Sen and Townsend's disagreement, I think. Exploring why Sen and Townsend each prefer their respective spaces could provide valuable insights. One hypothesis is that their disagreement stems from moral or political differences. Namely, while Sen is a philosopher of freedom, focusing on an individual's opportunity to do what she wants, Townsend aligns with the ideal of social integration, typical of egalitarian communitarian philosophers.[12]

However, an obvious issue with this hypothesis is its inconsistency with Townsend's pursuit of value-freedom. After all, Townsend's preference for the standard of living would ultimately stem from contextual judgments, contradicting his efforts to avoid the influence of moral and political values in poverty measurement. I will delve into this hypothesis further in a moment. But first, let me discuss the final aspect of Townsend's conception of relative deprivation: that it is a relative and, at the same time, an objective notion.

---

[11] Of course, examining the (still sparse) philosophical literature on the absolute or relative nature of poverty remains valuable. For instance, Fragoso and Lemay (2024) offer a comprehensive presentation of this debate and propose an intriguing solution to it.

[12] This hypothesis emerged from my reading of Townsend's "A Society for People" (1958), an essay often regarded as the closest reflection of his political philosophy (Glennerster, 2011: 320; Renwick: personal communication). Indeed, Robert Goodin's (1988: ch. 4) analysis of the British communitarian tradition seems to resonate with Townsend's emphasis on social integration found in his 1958 paper. Prominent figures in British egalitarian communitarianism include William Morris and Richard H. Tawney. Interestingly, White (2021: section 1.3) discusses political aspects related to the concept of relative deprivation, yet Townsend's work is not mentioned at any point! For a review of the capabilities approach from a moral and political perspective, see Robeyns and Byskov (2020).

c) Objective relative deprivation

The third and final remark about Townsend's concept of relative deprivation concerns the distinction between subjective and objective deprivation. He states that "[p]overty can be defined *objectively* and applied consistently only in terms of the concept of relative deprivation ... *The term is understood objectively rather than subjectively*" (Townsend, 1979: 31; my emphasis). In the introduction, I mentioned that I interpret his notion of objectivity as a general attitude of prioritizing epistemic values in social research (***Introduction, ii***). Here, however, I will discuss how Townsend employs this notion not in the context of social research in general, but specifically with regard to relative deprivation.

By focusing on objective relative deprivation, Townsend departs from the original sociological formulation of this concept, which refers to *subjective* deprivation. Here, this refers to an individual or group's *feelings* of deprivation, to which they believe they are entitled. This subjective notion of relative deprivation was coined by the authors of *The American Soldier*, a survey conducted in the late 1940s. Funded by the US War Department, the survey collected information from over half a million soldiers to investigate veterans' attitudes on various issues. It revealed discrepancies between respondents' comparisons with both societies at large and their primary comparisons' groups.

Sociologists Walter Runciman and Robert Merton further developed the notion to denote feelings of deprivation one may have when compared to others.[13] A person or group may compare themselves with different persons or groups. The reference groups – or "significant others" in terms of someone's feelings – become the benchmark from which an individual may feel deprived. In a society with diverse reference groups, a person or group may feel deprived compared to those closer to them but may be better off compared to the country as a whole. For instance, as Townsend notes, "a group of skilled manual workers may feel deprived in relation to a group of office staff, and it may be observed that their take-home earnings may be as high, or higher, than the salaries of the office staff" (1979: 48).

[13] The original study was coordinated by the American sociologist Samuel Stuffer and was published in four volumes in Stuffer *et al.* (1949). We find Merton's developing it out in his *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1968: chs. 10 – with Alice Rossi – and 11). Runciman's reference work is *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice* (1966).

Townsend claims that, in this context, relative deprivation "denote[s] *feelings* of deprivation relative to others and not *conditions* of deprivation relative to others" (1979: 47-48; emphasis on the original). Beyond feelings, subjective relative deprivation also concerns the *beliefs* an individual or collectivity holds about the facts related to deprivation. Townsend acknowledges that some beliefs may correspond to "actual deprivation," but these feelings and beliefs can and often mismatch with "objective" or "actual [relative] deprivation" (1979: 48). Take again the example of skilled manual workers experiencing subjective relative deprivation. To ascertain that "subjective and objective states are out of line," we should look for not only their earnings but their "actual working conditions, security of employment, promotion prospects and fringe benefits" and "the conditions available either to other groups of workers in the same industry, or workers comparable to themselves in other industries" (1979: 48). The result may be that they are, in fact, objectively deprived, but this is something to be checked.

The reference to other groups of workers in the same or comparable industries highlights an important issue. We have said that within a single society there are diverse reference groups. Then, which group defines this society's standard of living and, consequently, determines who is in poverty? Townsend asserts that the answer does not lie in an individual or group's beliefs or feelings about the matter. These do not determine the actual level of deprivation of the individual or group. To identify the most disproportionately deprived, we should examine the whole social structure of the society, and only then determine which group is actually the most deprived and therefore in poverty.

In a nutshell, regarding relative deprivation, Townsend's notion is objective as it is not determined by people's subjective states – their feelings or beliefs – but by the structure of society. I will talk more about the structural character of Townsend's theory below (***Section 5.2.1***).

***

I have attempted to clarify Townsend's conception of relative deprivation, arguing that it is based on the assertion that social needs are basic needs; that relative deprivation is inherent to society and its era; and that subjective views do not determine relative deprivation. But some readers might question whether, throughout these claims, Townsend was influenced by or relied on contextual judgments, ultimately contradicting value-freedom. Let us discuss this objection now.

d) Incompatible with value-freedom?

The objection states that, despite his own intentions, Townsend's theory conflicts with value-freedom. It is argued that his choice of deprivation from the standard of living as poverty's basal space – in contrast to alternatives like subsistence or capabilities – was influenced by moral or political values. Hence, the objection alludes to the hypothesis I have just mentioned (end of ***Section 3.1.1.b***). If true, his theory of poverty would not align with the value-free ideal.

Let us discuss an interesting way out of this objection. The argument is that a researcher can accept the value-free ideal while acknowledging that poverty involves a contextual judgment. Suppose Maria, a sociologist, wants to measure poverty in Brazil. Further suppose that Maria discovers through an opinion survey that the majority of Brazilian society holds moral and political values about poverty that differ from her own. For instance, let us assume the majority believes that the space of poverty's deprivation is defined by Brazil's standard of living, whereas Maria thinks that the deprivation space of poverty concerns basic capabilities. What space must Maria consider when constructing a poverty measure for Brazil? Well, Maria can choose to build her measure not according to her own values but based on those of Brazilian society. Why? Because she regards society's values as constituents of poverty, not as objects of her own evaluation or prescription. In the words of Sen, Maria's "poverty description will then *reflect* socially held value judgments rather than *be* value judgments themselves" (1980: 366, original emphasis).[14] Or in other words, poverty would refer to the contextual values of the relevant society, and Maria's analysis will still be value free – it will be free from her *own values or evaluations*. In fact, this is not just a theoretical possibility but it corresponds to the consensual approach in poverty measure.[15] We will discuss this approach further (***Conclusion, iii***).

---

[14] It is in that sense that Sen (1980b, 1981) claims that poverty can involve contextual judgments but still be objective: Maria would make an objective judgment about what are the values of Brazilian society.

[15] I am grateful to Alessandro Pinzani and Anna Alexandrova for pointing this possibility out to me. Alexandrova also hypothesizes that such an attitude is widespread in scientists measuring things like poverty, inequality, and deprivation. Further, she suggests that these "researchers who take on to study these phenomena have some ambition not to saddle science with the task of effecting moral progress" (personal communication). It is important to note that, as we will see, the followers of the consensual approach distinguish themselves from this kind of attitude as they strive to empirically account for society's value judgments and, more fundamentally, to do so motivated by a democratic ideal. Additionally, it might be argued that Townsend is not aligned with such researchers, as he might be aiming for such progress.

However, for two reasons this solution is not available to Townsend. First, as we have just mentioned, he denies any place for subjective judgments in constituting relative deprivation. Society's values are not relevant for determining poverty's basal space. Second, one of the "findings" of the PIITUK survey was that the majority of the British population holds the view that poverty concerns deprivation from subsistence, not from the standard of living (***Introduction, iv***). So, Townsend's conception of poverty diverges from a socially shared understanding of the concept.

We have mentioned that this is not an uncommon result of conceptualizations of *Ballung* concepts (***Section 2.2.1***). But does this mean that revisions in the extension and intension of ordinary concepts can happen freely? It is arguable to say that, when deviating from common, contemporary views, the burden of proof rest with those arguing for the revision.[16] On what grounds does Townsend base his preferred and revisionary notion of poverty's deprivation space?

It is conceivable that, ultimately and despite his explicit aims, my aforementioned hypothesis is right after all: Townsend might be implicitly influenced by egalitarian and communitarian intuitions, leading him to favor the standard of living as the most appealing basal space for measuring poverty. On the positive side, if Townsend's selection of poverty's basal space is acknowledged as stemming from a contextual judgment (***Section 1.2.1***) – and value-freedom is dropped out – his theory would gain both consistency and normative strength. On the downside, his approach might appeal only to those with similar moral and political beliefs. Indeed, an issue with this hypothesis lies in the PIITUK survey findings, which suggest Townsend is likely in the minority regarding this matter. Therefore, to influence public policies as he initially intended,

[16] A challenge for proposals of revisionary conceptions is determining the limits of revision. Specifically, when does a revision of the ordinary concept of poverty begin to alter its subject matter, that is, when does it start to address a fundamentally different subject? Cappelen (2018) explores this issue from the perspective of the philosophy of language, within the framework of what is known as "*conceptual engineering*." While this field is emerging within philosophy, I argue in Maia (2021) that this body of literature essentially replicates efforts already undertaken by many social scientists, such as Sen and Townsend. These figures have addressed the complexities of revisionary projects not from a purely theoretical standpoint but by considering the implications of these projects for scientific disciplines and policy proposals. I believe that their longstanding endeavor offers more promise than the purely theoretical approach of conceptual engineering – though this point is not crucial to the argument presented in this thesis.

Townsend would also need to engage with the moral and political disputes about contextual values.[17]

While this interpretation is worth considering, accepting it would also mean accepting the abandonment of Townsend's pursuit of value-freedom. Furthermore, I believe it would neglect a crucial aspect of his viewpoint on the relationship between social science and common perceptions about the phenomena being studied. Townsend's conception of poverty was intentionally revisionary but his arguments in favor of revision were not of moral or political nature. The conception was revisionary for the same reason that he rejected the consensual approach or other methods based on subjective views about poverty, as he writes:

> "I doubt whether reality should be regarded fundamentally as what people make of it. This is to confuse consciousness with the external construction of events. A distinction has to be made between subjective perceptions and objective structures and relationships, even when knowledge of that external reality is necessarily filtered through human perceptions." (Townsend, 1987b: 40).

We may say that Townsend believes the social scientist should, *prima facie*, be skeptical of commonsensical and subjective views about poverty. He asserts that "false consciousness is not an important sociological concept for nothing" (Townsend, 1985b: 44). Veit-Wilson expands on this, arguing that according to Townsend "social institutions of capitalism, the state and the family enslave individuals by shaping their lives and hence their needs. People do not recognise the forces which drive them" (Veit-Wilson, 1987: 196). Townsend posits that the criteria for determining people's real needs should not rely on their own perceptions but rather on their behavior which, he argues, can reveal aspects of the human condition that may not be transparent to their perceptions (Townsend *et al.*, 2006: 81-82). These aspects are mainly accessible through representative surveys and, primarily, transcultural anthropological observations. In fact, as we shall see below (***Section 5.2.1***), for him important features of poverty are opaque to commonsense, requiring the systematicity of science to uncover them. Furthermore, Townsend observes that the majority's views are "filtered through, or fostered by, the value or belief systems of sectional groups, the state or whole communities" (Townsend, 1985a: 660). This is why I argued that the notion of ideology

[17] This was arguably part of Sen's strategy when he advocated for measures of social states that extend beyond mere utility: he delved deeply into moral and political questions, and hence deserved to be called not only an economist but also a political philosopher.

is crucial in Townsend's pursuit of value-freedom (***Introduction, ii***). We shall see that for him the prevailing beliefs about poverty are those of the elites (***Section 5.3***). In this way, society's contextual values, beliefs, culture, and power dynamics serve as tools for them to maintain social order and control. This is what lurks behind his distrust of common sense.

Of course, one might object, "what philosophical position, what sets of facts and values, gives Townsend or any observer the privileged status of expert to identify other people's false consciousness or reinterpret the authentic needs of a society?" (Veit-Wilson, 1987: 197). Is not this stance fundamentally undemocratic? Also, why does this purportedly objective conception of poverty align with a critique of the subsistence approach and advocate for radical reforms of the British Welfare State? Does this not raise suspicions that it is merely an ideology of another kind – Townsend's preferred one – masquerading as "objective science"?

I will not pursue these objections further.[18] The crucial point is that all these suggest it might still be worthwhile to propose an alternative interpretation, one that views Townsend's selection of the standard of living not as inherently rooted in moral or political beliefs, but rather as an epistemic strategy aimed at achieving a comprehensive understanding of poverty. From this perspective, Townsend's selection of the standard of living is seen not as a reflection of personal moral or political values but as a choice designed to maximize the explanatory power, predictive accuracy, and unification of his theory. Accordingly, part of what his theory seeks to show is the epistemic advantages associated with choosing this basal space. In essence, choosing a society's standard of living as poverty's deprivation space could enhance the theory's alignment to various epistemic values, and hence its objectivity (in Townsend's sense at least).[19]

---

[18] In response to the first objection, Townsend argues, on the one hand, that criteria of need should not be determined by social perceptions, "whatever might be said about the valuable legitimating functions of mass endorsement of particular standards in a political democracy" (1985b: 44). On the other hand, we could speculate that as a Fabian, he believed the dissemination of such "objective" research could convince people of the adequacy of his conception. Thus, his revisionary view would not be imposed from above but would become common sense through its acceptance by the people. Regarding the other objection, Townsend might echo my discussion of Marx in note 16 of the ***Introduction***: He could argue that a scientifically rigorous analysis of poverty naturally aligns with the interests of those in poverty, not due to any ideological bias, but as a methodological – and perhaps fortuitous – consequence of a theory that prioritizes epistemic values.

[19] This interpretation aligns Townsend's perspective with the strategy that Badiei (2022) argued Marx, Friedman, and Mises employed to sidestep disputes over contextual values about their objects of research.

We have discussed two divergent responses to the objection that Townsend's choice of the standard of living as poverty's deprivation space involves a contextual judgment. The first response concedes to the objection, suggesting that the theory indeed harbors an inconsistency, which could be resolved by rejecting value-freedom. The other response denies that there is a contextual judgment. The latter is a response that apparently aligns more closely with Townsend's writings and defends the choice on the grounds of the epistemic values this space supposedly promotes, thereby preserving value-freedom.

Unfortunately, as it happens elsewhere, a definitive judgment about each answer extends far beyond the scope of this thesis. For now, let us look at the second element of the conceptualization: resources.

3.1.2. Resources

Resources play a pivotal and peculiar role in Townsend's theory. Here, he reflects the British tradition of viewing poverty as not only a deprivation of needs but as deprivation of needs with *a specific cause*. Let us revisit a passage I have already mentioned (***Section 2.3***) once more:

> Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty *when they lack the resources to obtain* the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or are at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong. *Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities.* (Townsend, 1979: 31; my emphasis)

Beyond a deprivation from a society's standard of living, poverty refers to such deprivation when *caused by a lack of resources*.[20] It is essential to understand in what sense resources function as a cause here. In Townsend's theory, the lack of resources does not *explain* poverty but is part of poverty's *constitution*. In the former sense, lack of resources would be the cause of the

[20] While this distinction between poverty and relative deprivation was already espoused in PITUK, he makes it explicit in Townsend (1987a). Also, here I disagree with Nájera and Gordon (2023) that suggests that Townsend aligns with the actually commonly held view that poverty is "the lack of command of sufficient resources over time, the outcome of which is social and material deprivation." That is, they claim that Townsend regarded poverty's basal space to be resources, not the standard of living. In this interpretation, deprivation from society's standard of living would not be poverty's basal space but an *effect* (a central effect, to be sure) of poverty. It is true that this view animates future developments of some research programs initiated by Townsend, but it is patently incompatible with his text and theory. It is also in contradiction to interpretations by other researchers, like Callan *et al.* (1993: 142).

phenomenon to be explained. Poverty would be the *explanandum* – the thing to be explained – and lack of resources the *explanans* – the explanation of the explanandum. In the latter sense, lack of resources is part of what poverty *is* – and this is Townsend's perspective. The role of resources in his theory is not to provide an explanation for the phenomenon but to distinguish it from other kinds of deprivation.[21]

This is another illustration of his conception diverging from a socially shared understanding of poverty. In fact, many people then claimed that Townsend's conception excludes important kinds of deprivations not caused by a lack of resources, but which should still be regarded as poverty. For those who believe that one of the main causes of poverty is an individual's choices, Townsend's conception might seem a spurious and arbitrary revision. Once more, remember that the CRP measurement theory states that a good measure demands arguments for how the concept to be measured is conceptualized. Below, we shall see that one of the reasons provided by Townsend in favor of his conceptualization of poverty is what he regarded as an anthropological observation. But he also, I believe, hoped that his conceptualization of resources would be justified by its greater ability to explain and predict poverty-related phenomena. Hence, such discrepancy with common speech would be an expected and desirable outcome of a systematic theory of poverty.

And what about the *meaning* of resources? Townsend is less explicit in outlining his conception of resources than in his detailed conception of standard of living, but we can assume that resources simply are *economic means* or *enablers* of something. However, a more important aspect of his theory is the recognition that there are different *kinds* of resources. The theory identifies five kinds of resources: cash income; private income in kind; capital assets; value of employment benefits in kind; and the value of public social services in kind (Townsend, 1979: 88-89).

One thing that may strike the reader is that although important, income concerns only one of the five kinds. In contemporary analyses of matters like inequality, in fact, it is common to acknowledge that analyses based solely on income inequality are vital but partial. Other kinds of

[21] As we shall see (***Section 5.1***), his proposed explanation for poverty involves the causes of the two elements that make up his conceptualization, which means the explanation of poverty lies in both the causes of a society's distribution of resources and its standard of living.

resources, such as access to public services and wealth ("capital assets"), are also important for the analysis. For instance, solely considering income inequality might depict Britain or Brazil as much more unequal than if we take into account their public health systems. Such considerations, however, were not as common at the time of PITUK's publication as they are today. Like his conception of poverty, Townsend regarded his conception of resources as revisionary, moving "beyond conventional conceptions or definitions" to "test" ordinary conceptions to try to reveal their inadequacies (1979: 230). He also put this revised conception into practice by devising his survey in a way that could capture the other kinds of resources that figure in this more comprehensive conception. In this way, his account of resource inequality would have broader explanatory power, comprehensiveness, and comparability (Townsend, 1979: 232).

The last paragraph concerns resource *inequality*. In what sense does this relate to poverty? For instance, one might criticize Townsend's conception of poverty and its measure, as it includes kinds of resources that are not relevant to assessing poverty. Take wealth, for example. Some might consider it really relevant for inequality, but not for poverty. As an answer, I think that this broader conception of resources is partly motivated by his endeavor to satisfy another epistemic value, unification. Remember, Townsend aimed to integrate poverty with the study of social inequality. Of course, one might deny that such integration is desirable or justifiable at all. But if someone is still not convinced that wealth has anything to do with poverty, a simple reason for doing so is that wealth or employment benefits "enable people to obtain material goods and services and styles of consumption in more or less generous measure than their fellows" (1979: 23). In summary, income is not the sole determinant of a person's standard of living, and thus, our analysis should extend beyond it.

Another consequence of considering kinds of resources beyond income pertains to the explanation of poverty. Townsend highlights the various *systems* that allocate resources in capitalist societies (for the list of the five kinds of resources and their main systems of distribution, see ***Table 3***):

> Living standards depend on the total contribution of not one but several *systems distributing resources* to individuals, families, work-groups and communities. To concentrate on cash incomes is to ignore the subtle ways developed in both modern and

> traditional societies for conferring and redistributing benefits. (Townsend, 1979: 54-55; my emphasis)

Townsend argues that poverty is partly the outcome of these systems. To explain poverty fully, we must examine the "scope, mechanisms and principles of distribution of each system controlling the distribution and redistribution of resources" (1979: 88).[22] For instance, if we only look at earned cash income (as indicated in ***Table 3***), we will only examine systems related to wages, salaries, and the fiscal system. However, this analysis would exclude other important systems. To name but a few: the public authority loans system, building societies and insurance companies, employer subsidies, capital issues system of companies, banks and insurance companies, and home production, as the family and the community.

[22] This is another facet of Richard Titmuss' influence on Townsend's work. One of Titmuss' major theoretical contributions was his comprehensive account of the various systems that distribute resources in capitalist societies (Wedderburn, 1981: 274). See note 3 in this ***Chapter 3***.

Table 3 Five kinds of resources and its main systems of distribution. **(Source:** Townsend. 1979: 88-89.**)**

KINDS OF RESOURCES	SYSTEMS OF DISTRIBUTION
Cash income	
Earned	Wage and salary systems of private industry and the state
	Self-employment income system
	Fiscal system
Unearned	Asset-holdings (rent, dividends, and interest from deposits with banks and building societies, insurance policies, land and buildings, government and company securities)
	Fiscal system
Social Security	Social insurance and assistance
	Employer sick pay and pensions
	Family
	Fiscal system
	Court maintenance orders
Capital assets	
House/flat occupied by family and possessions	Family
	Public authority loans system
	Building societies and insurance companies
	Employer subsidy
	Fiscal system
Assets (other than occupied house)	Employer gift
	Family
	Earnings
	Fiscal system
	Capital issues system of companies, banks, and insurance companies
Value of employment benefits	
Employers' fringe benefits (subsidies and value of occupational insurance)	Industrial welfare system
	Fiscal system
Occupational facilities	Industrial planning and management
	Safety inspectorate
	Trade union
Value of public services	
Chiefly other than cash, including government subsidies and services, e.g., health and education, but excluding social security	Central and local public education system
	Central and local public welfare system

Private income in kind	
Home production:	Family
	Personal leisure
	Self-employment
Gifts	Family
Value of personal supporting services	Family
	Community

The detailed definition of each item is found in "Appendix Five – Some definitions" *(Townsend, 1979: 980-985).*

3.1.3. Multidimensionality

To finish our account of Townsend's conception of poverty, it is important to note that both resources and the standard of living have many kinds. We might say, both are *multidimensional.* This is why Townsend's concept of poverty as relative deprivation is considered a precursor to multidimensional conceptions and measures of poverty (Beck *et al.*, 2020: 6).

A standard of living encompasses such a different set of things: "the amenities available to, and the customs or modes of living of, a majority of the population" (Townsend, 1979: 251).More precisely, it includes the "diet, clothing, fuel and light, home amenities, housing and housing facilities, the immediate environment of the home, the characteristics, security, general conditions and welfare benefits of work, family support, recreation education, health and social relations" (1979: 249). Being deprived of just one element in this set does not constitute poverty, but rather deprivation *simpliciter*. Therefore, relative deprivation refers to multiple kinds of deprivation *at once*.

Townsend conducts both unidimensional and multidimensional analyses of deprivation and of various kinds of resources in PITUK. For the multidimensional analyses, he needs to measure both *total resources* and an individual's *overall relative deprivation*. This is crucial not only for testing the point of disproportion but also for analyzing the overall distribution of total resources in the UK – a critical undertaking in his analysis of British inequality. To accomplish this, he constructs indices of these two multidimensional concepts, a process that involves aggregating diverse pieces of information into a single value. While such aggregation procedures have been more extensively discussed and refined within the context of axiomatic measures (***Section 2.2.2***), Townsend was well aware of some of the main challenges involved in this process:

> There are two special difficulties in deriving total rank in stratification theory from individual rank dimensions. Total rank is very difficult to express if the form of distribution varies in each individual dimension. It is also difficult to express if there is no criterion according to which the different dimensions can be weighted. The conversion of values in the different dimensions into equivalent cash incomes offers a means of overcoming the second problem. However, such a conversion may overlook subtleties in the different meanings placed on the value of assets, goods and services in everyday social life, as we shall see. (Townsend, 1979: 56n1)

Whether his solutions to these challenges are satisfactory is a different matter. Now, let us examine other two pivotal elements in Townsend's middle-range theory of poverty: hypotheses about the conception and the anthropological observations that motivate it.

3.2. Hypotheses and anthropological observations about poverty

This section presents the hypotheses and anthropological observations that lie at the core of Townsend's theory of poverty. These two are the components that give substance to his systematic middle-range theory of poverty. They also reflect how Townsend deployed quantitative *and* qualitative techniques in an interactive way to investigate the same phenomena. More importantly, they reflect how he regarded the two kinds of research as complementary.

It is fair to say that such a blend reflects Townsend's own mixed training. As Howard Glennerster (2011) points out, Townsend was initially trained as an anthropologist and only later as a quantitative social scientist. Glennerster notes that Townsend was interested in "not the anthropology of far away people … but close observation of the lives around him" (2011: 305). In fact, Townsend began by studying families in slums and working-class areas of London and other British cities. Later, he focused on investigating the lives of people living in "communal houses": public, private, and religious housing institutions – often regarded as remnants of the Old Poor Law – for the elderly and people with disabilities without family care. His primary goal with this research was to determine whether these institutions were really necessary in an industrial society like Britain and, if so, what form they should take. He conducted interviews with welfare authorities, staff, and residents, and also utilized simple observation techniques. But since then, he has also deployed "harder" types of evidence, so to speak, including the analysis of official records. To achieve some generality, he selected houses to visit based on a national random sample of 173

such housing units. The product was *The Last Refuge* (Townsend, 1964), a publication that along with similar studies, led him to conclude that "[the] public debate about social policy had a strange air of unreality alongside the facts of people's lives" (Townsend, 1958: 108). Indeed, this work played a pivotal role in the movement during the 1960s and 1970s, in Europe and Latin America, to reform and deinstitutionalize mental health care and promote community-based treatments.

Qualitative and quantitative methods differ, *inter alia*, in how detailed their propositions are, and how general or specific they are. Within Townsend's theory, qualitative observations of specific people's lives and their environments were sources for devising hypotheses with a certain level of generality, applicable to entire populations.[23] Conversely, the hypotheses focus on relationships between macro-level phenomena – primarily statistical aggregates. Surveys and the measures are tools for testing these hypotheses, and in cases of positive results, the causes of these macro-level relationships would stem from some of these anthropological observations of people's actions.[24]

But in his poverty theory, anthropological observations and hypotheses also played a vindicatory role. Townsend utilized anthropological observations (both his own and others') not merely for formulating hypotheses and providing explanations but also to *motivate* his conception of poverty. For instance, the claim that social needs are fundamental human needs underpins his adoption of relative deprivation as poverty's basal space. Townsend argues that this claim is based on transcultural anthropological observations.[25] Regarding hypotheses, some relate to the internal relationships within Townsend's conception of poverty, that is, the internal relationships between

[23] In this regard, Townsend can be seen as an enthusiast of what are called "Q-Squared approaches" to poverty research, which involve integrating quantitative with qualitative evidence. For a review of this, see Shaffer (2013). Nevertheless, on the other hand, he fundamentally aligns with what might be called a "quantitative approach," where qualitative findings are employed with the ultimate goal of building theories that have representativeness and broader applicability. In fact, Townsend's view aligns with John Goldthorpe's (2015) program for sociology. Both acknowledge human variation but nonetheless seek to identify and explain population-level regularities. Indeed, recounting his initial anthropological work among working-class people, Townsend noted that despite the variations he observed, he always "tried to make sense of them and to group people so that generalization might be possible" (Townsend, 1958: 109).

[24] I deliberately use the term "positive results" in quotation marks when discussing hypothesis testing to avoid entanglement with two major strands in 20th Century philosophy of science: verificationism and falsificationism. This choice is advantageous, especially considering that Townsend's theory is systematic in that sense given by Hoyningen-Huene: According to Hoyningen-Huene, his account of scientific systematicity is compatible with both verificationism and falsificationism (Hoyningen-Huene, 2013: 150).

[25] It should be noted that aside from references to thinkers such as Adam Smith, Townsend did not specify the sources of these putative transcultural anthropological observations.

its elements. Others concern the relationship between this conception and other phenomena typically associated with poverty. By framing these ideas as hypotheses, Townsend would allow his conception of poverty to be evaluated against "external criteria" (1979: 78) or, in other words, to be empirically validated. This is an instance of his efforts to make his conception satisfy epistemic values. The key epistemic value here is the capability to subject these hypotheses to empirical testing and, in cases of positive results, their ability to predict and ascertain some of the causes of poverty.

Let us now discuss in detail the hypotheses and observations of his theory, each in turn.

3.2.1. Hypotheses

Before continuing, I remember the reader of a point about the *objects* of these hypotheses. I have mentioned that by Townsend's theory of poverty, I am referring not only to its causes but to the entire set of products that constitute his middle-range theory about this phenomenon. Accordingly, the theory provides hypotheses not only about the causes of poverty but also about the elements of his conception. The former kind of hypotheses concerns the realm of its explanation of poverty, accounting for its relationship with other phenomena, such as social beliefs and welfare policies. The latter kind of hypothesis is different, as it pertains to the relationships between resources and the standard of living, as well as additional hypotheses intended to explain these relationships themselves.

There are two kinds of hypotheses in Townsend's theory: *value-related hypotheses* and *macro-level* or *functional hypotheses*. We will examine each of them in turn.

a) ***Value-related hypotheses***

These refer to the relationship between what Townsend perceives as the subjective side of the poverty phenomenon and its objective side. The former encompasses contextual values, people's beliefs and feelings, as well as social beliefs regarding the matter. We have seen that these elements do not constitute poverty nor determine who is in poverty. Poverty is not subjective deprivation, and someone may be in poverty without believing so. However, the poverty researcher can and should take an interest in these subjective states. For instance, are certain views about poverty more prevalent than others? What about the relationship between these subjective states

and the objective elements of poverty? How do they compare? Do they identify the same individuals as being in poverty? Do they overestimate or underestimate poverty according to objective relative deprivation?

Townsend formulates two hypotheses of this kind:

α. The official standard is the dominant subjective standard: *the level of cash payments to sectors of the population in need reflects, with some qualifications, where the poverty threshold should be according to large sections of a society's population.*

This hypothesis is operationally relevant as it provides a means for the poverty researcher to investigate subjective views about poverty in a given society. The prevailing view about it can then be discerned in the official measures of poverty that govern benefit levels in modern welfare states. This might allow the researcher to check other hypothesis such as whether variations in these levels between different countries relate to levels of economic development or cultural standards.

And what is the relationship between the dominant view about poverty and the objective view? This is what Townsend hypothesized:

β. Inadequacy of the official standards: *the level set by the official poverty standard falls below the level set by the cut-off measure.*

This would imply that the dominant subjective view about poverty underestimates objective poverty. Townsend posits that one reason for this possible inadequacy is the influence of contextual values and misguided social beliefs about this level.

Thus, hypotheses α and β connect subjective views about poverty with objective claims.

b) Macro-level hypotheses

It is accurate to say that macro-level are the most significant and well-known hypotheses in Townsend's theory. To start, these hypotheses specify relationships between aggregate phenomena. In our context, they pertain to functional relationships between the two elements of poverty: resources and the majority's (also referred to as "national") standard of living. They are formulated as hypotheses about the relationship between inequality in the distribution of resources and the majority's style of living. Here, they refer to resources ranked in descending order.

The hypotheses propose that for an individual, family, or household:

1. ***Direct relationship:*** *participation in the majority's standard of living has an inverse relationship with diminishing resources* (Townsend, 1979: 57; 59).

This hypothesis unfolds into two more specific hypotheses:

1.1. Resources and multiple deprivations: *people who lack the necessary resources will, in most cases, experience multiple and overlapping kinds of deprivation.*

1.2. Resources and cumulative deprivations: *deprivation from participation in the majority's standard of living becomes more comprehensive and intense as resources decrease.*

Lastly, we also find two further hypotheses:

2. ***Proportional but gradual:*** *participation in the majority's standard of living decreases proportionally to falling levels of resources, but the decline is more gradual than the decrease in resources* (Townsend, 1979: 59).
3. ***Point of disproportion:*** *there is a point in the scale of resource distribution where participation in the majority's standard of living begins to decrease disproportionately* (Townsend, 1979: 57; 59).[26]

The point of disproportion hypothesis is directly related to the cut-off measure of poverty: it is this point that determines the *objective* or *scientific poverty line*. Consequently, Townsend argues that if social benefits aimed at combating deprivation, such as the British Supplementary Benefit, are to be effective, their levels should align with this point of disproportion.[27] Therefore, we could reinterpret hypothesis β as stating that the level set by official poverty standards, like the Supplementary Benefit, falls below the level indicated by the point of disproportion.

Let us now look at the role that observations play in Townsend's theory.

3.2.2. Observations

More than just providing material to devise hypotheses, observations about people's lives are the cornerstones of his approach as they play a dual role: they are *reasons for how Townsend*

[26] It is in this context that Townsend also asserts that his conception of poverty "attempts to provide an estimate of objective poverty on the basis of *a level of deprivation disproportionate to resources*" (Townsend, 1979: 248-249; my emphasis).

[27] Here, I am temporarily setting aside T. H. Marshall's challenge to Townsend's view, regarding the link between "two horses," one being sociological theory and the other prescribing social policy. I will address this challenge later (***Conclusion, b***).

conceptualized poverty and they help *explain some of the aggregate-level relationships*. We shall examine each kind of observation based on its role in turn.

a) Observations that are reasons for his conception

Here we have two observations: that there is a *majority's style of living* and that there is a *basic need for social integration*. Let us start with the former. It addresses the issue mentioned above that, within the same society, there is variation in styles of living. Consider ethnic minorities, for instance. Do their potentially different styles of living share some similarities? Does their existence preclude the idea of a majority's standard of living that could then figure in Townsend's conception of poverty? The answer is no, because:

> this tends to ignore the marked interrelationship of many communities within regional and national economic, political, communication, welfare and other systems. Members of ethnic minorities can often be said to participate in commonly shared rather than exclusive activities. They use the common system of transport, work in multiracial occupations, go to multiracial schools which broadly subscribe to national cultural values, and generally adapt in many ways to the conventions and styles of life of the national society. Many of their needs will therefore be the same as of persons who are not members of such minorities and the same as of persons who are members of other minorities. (Townsend, 1979: 53)

This passage is an observation that motivates his conception of the majority's standard of living. In other words, this observation states that:

a. ***Majority's style of living:*** *there is a society's standard of living, that is, an accepted and encouraged style of living by the majority of the national population* (Townsend, 1979: 59; 249).

Now, let us look at the second and perhaps more fundamental observation:

b. ***Social integration:*** *people have a basic need for social integration*.

This observation primarily motivates his conception of social needs as basic, in contrast to the traditional emphasis on subsistence needs (***Section 3.1.1***). Secondly, it motivates his conceptualization of resources as the cause of relative deprivation (***Section 3.1.2***). Indeed, social integration suggests that a significant barrier preventing people from participating in the majority's standard of living is not a matter of personal choice or preference, but rather a scarcity of their own resources, which stands out as a key factor.

Some may argue that Townsend's emphasis on social integration is either a trivial fact or a tentative hypothesis. If it is a trivial fact, then integration does not significantly contribute to our understanding of poverty. If it is a tentative hypothesis, it must be tested; only with positive results can it serve as an explanation for the functional relationships between resources and the standard of living. Also, as a tentative hypothesis, Townsend would be circular in using it to motivate his conception of human needs, relative deprivation, and poverty.

While Townsend sometimes takes for granted the view that humans have a need for integration, he also refers to it as the product of scientific observations:

> In *observations of behaviour in every society* the drive to satisfy hunger sometimes takes second place to other drives, especially those which are conditioned by other peoples' expectations or because of an inculcated sense of obligation in the workplace or at home, or through sheer coercion. (Townsend, 1985a: 664; my emphasis)

Thus, the drive for integration is an empirical statement based on what he considers to be anthropological observations. In fact, towards the end of his life, he called social integration as the "chief criticism" of the subsistence approach:

> people are not simply individual organisms requiring replacement of sources of physical energy. They are social beings expected to perform socially demanding roles as workers, citizens, parents, partners, neighbours and friends (Lister, 1990). Moreover, they are not simply consumers of physical goods but producers of those goods and are also expected to act out different roles in their various social associations. They are dependent on collectively provided utilities and facilities. These needs apply universally and not merely in the rich industrial societies. (Townsend, 2006: 19) [28]

Now, let us consider those observations that have an explanatory role in the theory.

b) Observations that explain relationships at the macro-level

These observations concern mechanisms intended to explain, at the individual or micro-level, the functional relationships previously mentioned at the macro-level. Specifically, micro-

[28] Brazilian readers may recall the lyrics of the band Titãs: "Bebida é água / Comida é pasto / Você tem sede de quê? / Você tem fome de quê? / A gente não quer só comida / A gente quer comida, diversão e arte" ["Drink is water / Food is pasture / What are you thirsty for? / What are you hungry for? / We don't want food alone / We want food, fun, and art"].

level hypotheses pertain to mechanisms at the level of a person's actions.[29] I call them *sacrifice* and *isolation*. Starting with the former observation:

c. ***Sacrifice:*** *people close to the point of disproportion tend to sacrifice or make the best of their efforts to participate in the nation's standard of living even without adequate resources.*

This hypothesis explains hypothesis (2), *proportional but gradual*. It corresponds to earlier claims made by economists like Adam Smith and researchers like Rowntree that, in Townsend's words we have just mentioned, state that "in every society the drive to satisfy hunger sometimes takes second place to other drives, especially those which are conditioned by *other peoples' expectations* or because of an *inculcated sense of obligation* in the workplace or at home, or through *sheer coercion*" (1985a: 664; my emphasis).[30] In fact, we may say that the sacrifice hypothesis follows from social integration.

It is important to remember that these expectations, obligations, and coercion affect not only the rich but also the poor, even though the latter "cannot buy goods as expensive as those bought by, or live as well as, the rich." The poor too "are presumed … to engage in the same broad scheme of consumption, customs and activities [as the rich]" (1979: 922). Consequently, the poor "strive to conform with what is expected of them [even] when income shrinks (they economize in what they do but still undertake the same activities)" (1985a: 662; see also 1993: 39).

Finally, we have:

d. ***Isolation:*** *below the point of disproportion, people are excluded or withdraw from the majority's standard of living* (Townsend, 1979: 57; 59; 249).

This observation explains hypothesis (3), *point of disproportion*. We should note that isolation may result from two different processes. One is systematic *exclusion* from access to resources, which in turn are needed to access this standard (Townsend, 1979: 566). Exclusion relates to what Townsend called "social minorities" (***Section 5.3.1***).

---

[29] I refer to them as "personal" mechanisms rather than "behavioral" or "psychological" mechanisms, due to the contested issue in economics about what is the most appropriate focus for hypotheses concerning people's actions. In any case, I am not entirely convinced about Townsend's stance on this issue (if he had any at all).

[30] In the passage by Alfred Marshall that I previously mentioned (note 58 in ***Chapter 1***), we also find the observation that "in order to obtain them [conventional necessities] the average man and woman will sacrifice some things which are necessary for efficiency" (Marshall, 1890: 58). Similar observations were also made by Adam Smith's predecessors (Smite, 1981 [1776]: 870n2).

The other process is when isolation is an action of "drop-out" or "withdraw":

> [in isolation] they *withdraw* (or *withdraw* their children) from fulfilling certain social obligations or well-established customs or activities. They no longer meet friends, children are occasionally absent from school, heating is turned off, conventional diets are no longer regularly observed, visitors are not longer invited into the home, ill-health and disability become more common. (Townsend, 1985a: 662; my emphasis)

The reader might think there is an inconsistency between isolation caused by withdrawal and social integration: If people have a drive for integration, how could they withdraw from it? Well, first of all, somewhere Townsend claims that below the point of disproportion, social participation becomes "impossible" which means that whether people are willing or not to integrate does not matter in the end (Townsend, 1979: 59). In any case, some might argue that this implies these individuals choose to neglect their basic needs. However, is not this as absurd as suggesting that a person can simply disregard other basic needs, such as hunger? Indeed, answering these questions could lead us into debates on the philosophy of action. Intriguing as these debates are, it suffices to say that, yes, there are cases of extreme – almost complete – isolation. But the thing is that below the point of disproportion, social participation decreases *disproportionately* but still not discretely. This would indicate that most people below the point of disproportion still maintain some connection – faint as they may be – to their society's customs or activities.

Conclusion

Townsend's conception of poverty states that poverty is relative deprivation caused by lack of resources. This conception of relative deprivation refers to a society's standard of living, that is, the style of living approved by the majority of the population. This entails three important features in his conception of poverty. First, deprivations related to social needs are fundamental deprivations; in other words, social needs are basic needs too. Second, even food deprivation is relative to a given society. Third, poverty refers to objective relative deprivation, which means relative to a society's social structure but *not* to people's feelings and beliefs about deprivation. While one might object that Townsend relies on contextual judgments in this conceptualization, contradicting his pursuit of value-freedom, he might argue that his choice is justified through epistemic values.

The conception also precisify the cause of relative deprivation: lack of resources. Townsend's conception of resources encompasses every economic means that contributes to someone's standard of living. As a consequence, it goes much beyond income, directing our attention to the various societal systems that distribute different kinds of resources. Finally, both his conception of deprivation and resources are multidimensional, which means they are composed of different kinds, with different features, and maybe with different causes. Thus, for operationalizing the cut-off measure, Townsend must devise an adequate index of relative deprivation and total resources.

Observations and hypotheses play pivotal roles in Townsend's theory of poverty. They improve our understanding of his conception of poverty as relative deprivation caused by lack of resources and also aim to justify its adoption over alternatives. The hypotheses establish relationships between the elements of the conception and between these elements and other phenomena. The observations motivate the conception, stating that it is based on evidence such as transcultural anthropological observations. They also aim to explain some aggregate-level relationships that are the object of some hypothesis, by establishing mechanisms at the level of people's actions.

To test these hypotheses, a measure and a data source are needed. These are the two elements of the theory that will be discussed next.

CHAPTER 4
Measures and Procedures

Introduction

In his review of *Poverty in the United Kingdom*, Ian Gough asserts that Townsend employed not only the cut-off measure but also three additional measures in his analysis of poverty: the *state* or *official standard*, given by the levels of public assistance benefit to people in poverty in a country (also called the "*administrative measure*"); the *relative income standard*, given by a percentage of the mean income of the population; and the *deprivation standard*, which is given by Townsend's index of relative deprivation (Gough, 1981: 317-319). According to Gough, of these four measures, two are subjective, and one is objective but does not establish a threshold where relative deprivation escalates disproportionately, thus, failing to distinguish between those who are in poverty and those who are not. Given Townsend's emphasis on objectivity and the need for an objective measure of poverty, the question then arises: why is this the case?

It is conceivable that Townsend employed these three additional measures because the evidence for the point of disproportion hypothesis was tentative at best. While this might be true, however, I also believe this reflects the systematic character of Townsend's theory. As T. H. Marshall notes, "it would be wrong to imagine that the chief value of this [Townsend's] vast piece of research rests in the overall picture of a condition which we call 'poverty'" (1981: 84). Marshall suggests that Townsend's thorough analysis of different aspects of relative deprivation is valuable irrespective of the existence of a point of disproportion that separates poor from the non-poor. For instance, the variation that Townsend "finds" across the scale of resource distribution, occupations, areas, and demographic factors such as unemployment, gender, and age, represents valuable research findings. In our words, the other elements of the theory are valuable regardless of the outcome of the tests of the point of disproportion hypothesis.

Additionally, utilizing a variety of poverty measures may fulfill the epistemic values of explanatory power and comparability. Townsend meticulously presents and juxtaposes the frequently divergent outcomes yielded by these four measures when applied to the same data set,

that is, the PITUK survey.[1] Further, subjective measures yield critical insights because they encapsulate societal beliefs and contextual values about poverty. Crucially, they are part of the explanation of poverty, as they influence the distribution of resources within a society. Therefore, a theory that include subjective measures in its *explanandum* is one with greater explanatory power.

This chapter presents the other two elements of Townsend's middle-range theory of poverty: representation and procedures, detailing the construction of both the relative deprivation measure and the cut-off measure. To do this, I explore the development and application of two indexes: the *index of total resources* and the *index of relative deprivation*. These indexes are essential tools in operationalizing Townsend's theory, as they allow testing the functional hypotheses about the conception of poverty (***Section 3.2.1***). Indeed, the cut-off measure is contingent upon the success of testing one of these hypotheses, the point of disproportion. I will also discuss the survey methodology employed in PITUK. The survey is *the* crucial tool for Townsend collecting the data that these measures need. We will examine the main features of the PITUK survey, focusing on the practical aspects of data collection and Townsend's documentation of the challenges he and his team encountered during its conduct. The chapter will also briefly comment on the procedures to ensure the validity and reliability of the survey results.

This chapter will also present selected results of Townsend's analysis as they serve as good illustrations of the theory. Nevertheless, the assumptions underlying Townsend's procedures, as well as the procedures themselves, are all contested. Townsend himself conceded that the findings regarding the point of disproportion hypothesis were "tentative" at best. These issues suggest that the results from PITUK are best viewed not as definitive conclusions, but as illustrations of Townsend applying his theory to empirical data. Thus, I will refer to these as his "findings" to highlight their contested status (see ***Introduction, iv***).

***

[1] Similar to the approach observed in PITUK, it is a common practice among poverty researchers to analyze poverty within the same population using different measures (for instance, according to the IPL and 60% of mean income). However, I believe that their rationale differs from Townsend's. My hypothesis is that these researchers are concerned with providing an analysis of poverty that relies less on a single "right" or "best" measure of poverty – thereby mitigating the risk of their analysis being compromised by flaws within a single measure. Instead, they focus on generating results that are robust across different measures.

Sections' outline

The four measures of poverty are presented in ***Section 4.1***. Next, in ***Section 4.2***, I present and discuss how Townsend constructs and applies the index of total resources and the index of relative deprivation to arrive at the cut-off measure. Throughout, I will also present a selection of PITUK's "findings." I finish the chapter in ***Section 4.3*** with a presentation and discussion of the main tool for gathering the data related to poverty: the PITUK Survey.

4.1. Four measures of poverty

In this section, I will present the four measures that Townsend employed in PITUK. In the book, Townsend conducts numerous descriptive exercises and runs dozens of analyzes on various aspects of poverty in the UK. Most of the time, he does not use his famous cut-off measure. Instead, the bulk of the work involves applying three other measures, comparing their results and interpreting them to build his theory of poverty. Curiously, of these three measures, only one is objective, as noted below:

Subjective Measures:

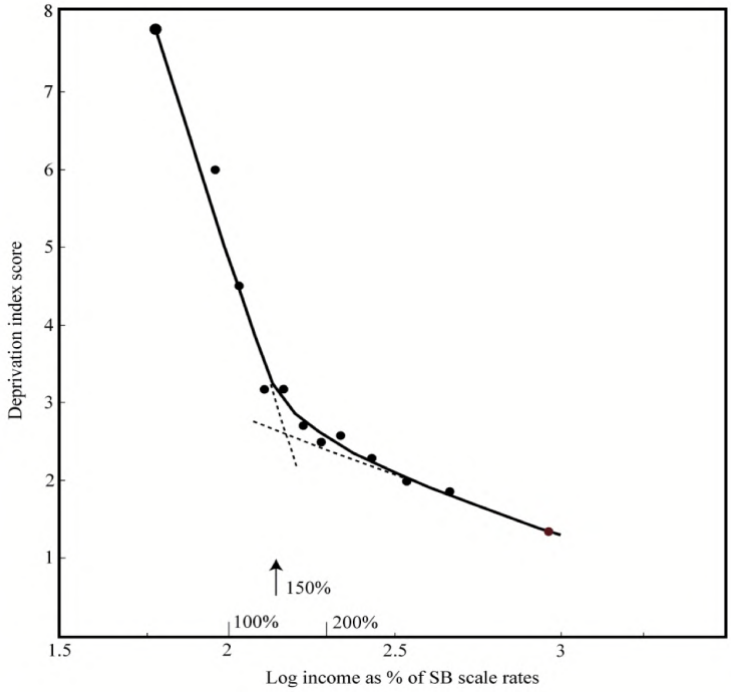
- ***State measure:*** given by the society's public assistance benefit. A prominent example is the *Supplementary Benefit standard*, the criteria used by Britain's welfare system to qualify families for several poverty-related policies.
- ***Relative income measure:*** based on a percentage of a society's average income. For instance, those earning less than 60% of the mean income could be considered to be in poverty under a measure of this kind.

Objective Measures:

- ***Relative deprivation measure*** **(or simply *deprivation measure):*** it measures the level of an individuals' deprivation from her society's standard of living. It does not establish a specific poverty line and thus is applied across all societal segments, regardless of income ranges.
- ***Cut-off measure:*** it is set at a hypothesized point determined by a resource level below which households experience disproportionate relative deprivation. (For making this more concrete, see ***Figure 4***.)

Note: The deprivation measure does not enable us to identify those that are in poverty and those that are not, but only to rank individuals according to their levels of deprivation.[2] The cut-off measure, however, provides a means to distinguish those who are disproportionately deprived – that is, those in poverty – from those that are not. In any case, the deprivation measure alone is a tool for Townsend to test other hypotheses (such as direct relationship; resources and multiple deprivation; resources and cumulative deprivation; and proportional but gradual – see ***Section 3.2.1.b***). Using this measure, Townsend also analyzes patterns of deprivation throughout PITUK, examining its relationship to other important variables such as class, occupation, age, and gender, and comparing its results about poverty in the UK with those obtained from other measures.

Figure 4 Graph that illustrates the results of the cut-off measure. **(Source:** Townsend, 1979: 261.**)**



Townsend's original description says, "Modal deprivation by logarithm of income as a percentage of supplementary benefit scale rates" (1979: 261; Figure 6.4)

Now, it is time to finally discuss in detail the index of total resources and the index of relative deprivation.

[2] In this way, the deprivation index is similar to measures of well-being that do not divide a population into two distinct groups but only rank them accordingly.

4.2. Two indexes and the cut-off measure

With this section, readers should gain an understanding of the context and rationale behind a crucial figure in the theory, namely, the graph that Townsend derived when operationalizing his conception of poverty based on the results of PITUK Survey (***Figure 4***). To achieve this, we need to present the procedures he used to first produce the indexes of resources and relative deprivation, and second, how he applied these indexes to test the point of deprivation hypothesis. *If* the test produces positive results, then the cut-off measure would be set at that point.

A note about indexes. We have seen that both conceptions of resources and standard of living are made up of different elements. As previously mentioned (***Section 2.3***), a society's standard of living includes its ordinary living patterns, customs, and activities. More concretely, Townsend describes it as "the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or are at least widely encouraged or approved" in a society (1979: 31). These are diverse elements. Some are related to *consumption items*, others to household *amenities*. Others are *activities* like having a birthday party. On the resource side, we have seen that Townsend enumerates five kinds: cash income, capital assets, employment benefits in kind, public social services in kind, and private income in kind. To investigate inequalities in each, Townsend needed to classify individuals based on their access level to each kind of resource. Now, however, he needs to rank them according to their command over *total resources*. Another aggregation procedure is needed. So, to sum up, measuring relative deprivation and resources requires indexes that sum up these diverse elements.

Neither of the two aggregation procedures is straightforward. Below, we will discuss one important issue in calculating each of them. In the case of resources, we face the *problem of marketability*. In the case of relative deprivation, there is the previously mentioned issue of *item selection*.

4.2.1. Index of total resources

As we have seen, to create a ranking of total resources, each one of the five kinds of resources should be converted to a common unit. In PITUK, Townsend decided to convert all non-income resources into monetary values. If he succeeded, this would be a great advantage, given

that income is typically considered to be measured on the ratio scale, which allows us to perform all four basic mathematical operations (***Section 2.2.2***). Recall, the five kinds are earned cash income, capital assets, value of employment benefits, value of public social services other than cash, and private income in kind. The procedure involved assigning monetary values to the latter four kinds.

This process required a series of complex and controversial steps, along with related issues. It may be worthwhile to discuss one of these issues: the problem of marketability. It basically refers to this question: Does it make sense to include what are often considered non-marketable goods in the measurement of someone's resources? For instance, to arrive at the value of public social services, Townsend estimated the average administrative fees associated with the real consumption of various services (such as education, health, welfare, and housing), based on the survey "findings." Before we question the validity of this kind of procedure, the problem of marketability raises the question of whether it is appropriate to consider such services in market terms, even for the purposes of measurement.

In his discussion of this problem, Townsend refers to reports by the *Royal Commission on the Distribution of Income and Wealth*, a commission established by the government to study the distribution of income and wealth in the UK.[3] In their first report, the Commission chose to analyze income and wealth separately, based on the premise that an individual's wealth and general resources cannot be reduced to a single rod. Additionally, the Commission viewed communal assets and human capital as not adequately represented in market terms (Townsend, 1979: 231).

Grossly, the main objection Townsend raises against this approach is that an imperfect conversion procedure that acknowledges and is transparent about its limitations is better than none. Decisions like that of the Commission systematically underestimate the extent of inequality and, in Townsend's words, "virtually amounted to an abdication of responsibility for the conclusions that could be drawn from their report" (1979: 232). The result is not challenging conventional views about the matter, a desideratum he aimed to realize (***Section 3.1.1.d***). Townsend argues that independent social researchers should be cautious with what he called "official approaches to

[3] Also known as the "Diamond Commission," this Royal Commission was established in 1974 under Jack Diamond's chairmanship and was dissolved in 1979. Its purpose was to investigate and report on issues related to the distribution of personal incomes and wealth, as directed by the Government (Royal Commission on Distribution, 1974-1980).

official statistics" (Townsend, 1979: 231); they should scrutinize them rather than accepting them at face value. In his analysis of inequality in the UK, he aimed to do this by developing his measure of total resources, keeping in mind two epistemic values: comprehensiveness and comparability. This, he believed, would likely "provide an alternative conception of social and economic conditions" in the country (1979: 233).

Some "findings." First, it is illustrative to look at the relative importance of each kind of resource for total command over resources (***Table 4.1***). This confirmed the expected importance of cash incomes in total resources (58%). But the relative importance of wealth ("imputed income from assets") is also evident (23%).

Table 4.1 Relative importance of kinds of resources. **(Source:** Townsend, 1979: 226.**)**

Percentage of gross disposable resources provided by	
net disposable cash incomes	58%
imputed income from assets	23%
imputed value of employers' welfare benefits in kind	5%
imputed value of social services in kind	12%
imputed value of private income in kind	2%

This main general "finding" provided evidence supporting the hypothesis that focusing solely on income leads to an underestimation of the actual level of inequality within the UK. To underpin this conclusion, Townsend primarily used the Gini coefficient in his analyses (1979: 229). He identified two main factors that increased inequality: employer welfare benefits and imputed income from assets. Conversely, two factors that decreased inequality were social services and private income in kind. However, when all four kinds of non-income resources are considered alongside net disposable income – that is, "gross disposable income less expenses in going to work, including clothing or equipment allowed for tax purposes as well as costs of travel" (1979: 180) – the overall distribution of resources becomes more unequal. Additionally, the top 20% of households based on net disposable income also received the highest monetary value in each kind of resource, including significant imputed income from assets and employer welfare benefits.

4.2.2. Index of relative deprivation

While distinct from poverty (which could be determined only through the cut-off measure), results about the UK's relative deprivation have an importance of their own. This was T. H. Marshall's claim (1981: 84), who argued that Townsend's biggest achievement was the several analyses of this kind of deprivation and its relationship to resource inequality. In this section, I will present the procedures Townsend used to build the index of relative deprivation, followed by some of its results. A natural question arises regarding the rationale for these procedures. As we shall see, one procedure in particular was heavily criticized: how he selected the indicators of relative deprivation.

Townsend took three steps to build the index. First, he calculated no fewer than 60 indicators of relative deprivation (see this thesis' ***Appendix: List of 60 indicators of style of living*** for the complete list). This was only possible, after all, because of his comprehensive survey. Second, he chose five dimensions: *dietary*, *household*, *familial*, *recreational*, and *social deprivation*, and then narrowed the list of indicators down to twelve (***Table 4.2***). The final step involved determining how many indicators someone should score to be regarded as relatively deprived, that is, what counting criterion Townsend chose (***Section 2.2.3.b***). A minimum of five out of the twelve indicators (an intermediate criterion) was required (Townsend, 1979: 252). Scores for different indicators were added, with equal weight to each. Townsend asserted that the higher the score, the lower the social participation.

More "findings." As with his index of total resources, Townsend calculated the proportion of each of the twelve indicators within the population (***Table 4.2***). Some "findings" were particularly striking. For instance, over half of the population, 54%, had not had a week's holiday away from home in the preceding year, and over half of the children, 57%, did not have a party on their last birthday.

Now, we need to ask: How and why did Townsend arrive at this list of sixty indicators? How and why did he select the twelve "representative" indicators? And lastly, how and why did he decide on an intermediate counting criterion?

Table 4.2 The twelve indicators that make up the "provisional" or "summary" index of relative deprivation, and the proportion of population deprived in each. **(Source:** Townsend**,** 1979: 250**.)**

Indicator	% deprived
1. Has not had a week's holiday away from home in last 12 months	54%
2. *Adults only.* Has not had a relative or friend to the home for a meal or snack in the last 4 weeks	33%
3. *Adults only.* Has not been out in the last 4 weeks to a relative or friend for a meal or snack	45%
4. *Children only* (under 15). Has not had a friend to play or to tea in the last 4 weeks	36%
5. *Children only.* Did not have party on last birthday	57%
6. Has not had an afternoon or evening out for entertainment in the last two weeks	47%
7. Does not have fresh meat (including meals out) as many as four days a week	19%
8. Has gone through one or more days in the past fortnight without a cooked meal	7%
9. Has not had a cooked breakfast most days of the week	67%
10. Household does not have a refrigerator	45%
11. Household does not usually have a Sunday joint (3 in 4 times)	26%
12. Household does not have sole use of four amenities indoors (flush WC; sink or washbasin and cold-water tap; fixed bath or shower; and gas or electric cooker)	21%

*See this thesis' **Appendix: List of 60 indicators of style of living** for the list of all indicators)*

We have noted that Townsend recognized that while societies like Britain exhibit a variety of styles of living, this does not preclude the existence of a majority's standard of living. He writes:

> There is no unitary and clear-cut national 'style of living'. Rather, there are series of overlapping and merging community, ethnic, organizational and regional styles. By style of living I do not mean *particular* things and actions in themselves, but *types* of

> consumption and *customs* which are expressive of social form. (Townsend, 1979: 249; original emphasis.)

Thus, Townsend conceives of a society's majority standard of living not as a collection of specific items and practices, but rather as more abstract categories and customs that manifest differently across various groups. With this distinction, he aims to acknowledge the diversity of styles of living within the same society while maintaining the notion of a comprehensive societal standard of living. For instance:

> Christmas may be celebrated by an exchange of gifts from Woolworth's, a few glasses of beer and a chicken from a broiler factory; or by an exchange of gifts in the best tradition of Harrods or Heal's, together with all the luxurious trappings of a country-house weekend party: The point at which a custom is no longer practised is debatable. (Townsend, 1979: 249)

Townsend acknowledges the challenge in operationalizing such a national majority's standard of living while also considering this variety. An adequate operationalization, he claims, would involve identifying numerous items related to various age groups, peer and generational dynamics, as well as regional and ethnic factors. Different "spheres of social life," such as work, school, home, and community settings, must be considered (Townsend, 1979: 249). While herculean, this would enable a researcher to differentiate elements of styles of living that are common across large sectors from those unique to each minority.

In practice, this would result in a list of several indicators reflecting each of these elements. Townsend argues that constructing such a list requires:

> an exhaustive analysis of the amenities available to, and the customs or modes of living of, a majority of the population, in the course of which the representativeness and independence of different items and their frequency and symbolic as well as material importance would have to be discussed. (1979: 251)

However, PITUK did not strictly follow these guidelines. The survey's indicators of relative deprivation only addressed what Townsend deemed the primary areas of personal, household, and social life relevant to examining the interplay between styles of living and resource

distribution. Ultimately, the selection of the sixty indicators was based "on the basis of pilot interviews and knowledge of previous studies of life-styles and amenities" (1979: 251).[4]

As for the reduced list of twelve indicators comprising the relative deprivation index, he chose those applicable to the general population, covering "major aspects of dietary, household, familial, recreational and social deprivation" (1979: 251). But how did this account for the different styles of living of social groups within the UK? Townsend intended each indicator to represent a different minority, but in the end, only three of the twelve indicators applied to "a small majority" (1979: 251). Furthermore, when testing the point of disproportion hypothesis, he employed additional indicators beyond the twelve selected to check for the robustness of the results; yet he did not specify which indicators these were (Townsend, 1979: 255).

Why did Townsend opt for an intermediate counting criterion when determining relative deprivation? He justifies this by precisely citing the diversity of styles of life:

> [n]o sole item, or even a combination of two items, can distinctly signal overall deprivation. Individuals have unique preferences and might choose certain extravagances or enforce certain restrictions due to religious, ethical, educational, or other motives, irrespective of their economic status. (Townsend, 1979: 252)

Both the conception of a national style of living that accommodates subnational diversities and these procedures have been widely debated since (Piachaud, 1993 [1981]; Ferragina *et al.*, 2017: 535-537). Critics argue Townsend's distinction between commodities and customs of different levels of generality is untenable.[5] Also, they claimed that the selection of the initial sixty indicators and of the reduced list of twelve indicators were arbitrary or biased. Indeed, beyond the remark of basing the selection on pilot interviews and previous knowledge (1979: 251), Townsend does not sort out the rationale behind the selection of the indicators. Here, he may be succumbing

[4] He did not specify which "previous studies" he refers to, but we can infer that they might include works such as his own *The Last Refuge* (see ***Section 3.2***).

[5] Thus, these critics reject the cogency of Townsend's observation that there is a majority's style of living (***Section 3.2.2.a***). Using a broader data set and modern statistical methods, Ferragina *et al.* (2017) attempt to operationalize Townsend's approach, also considering the diversity in styles of life among various ethnic minorities in the UK. They argue that it was not possible to identify a single threshold applicable to all groups; nevertheless, they observed a consistent pattern in which, across all groups, relative deprivation escalates as income diminishes.

to the same trap he critiqued in Rowntree's work, namely, the selection of indicators based on his own biases and socio-economic background rather than on objective scientific criteria.[6]

To his credit, Townsend stated that the sixty indicators were part of an "experimental stage" of research, and the twelve-indicator index was labeled "provisional" and calculated for "illustrative purposes" (1979: 251). Thus, he acknowledged the tentative nature of PITUK's "findings." Whether this acknowledgment is sufficient is something I will leave as an open question.

Nevertheless, what were the outcomes of the research concerning the relationship between the relative deprivation index and the index of total resources? This is the question we will address next.

4.2.3. Associating the two indexes

The index of total resources and the index of relative deprivation enabled Townsend to examine the relationships between resources and relative deprivation. This essentially involved testing some of the hypotheses we discussed earlier (***Section 3.2.1***). Before turning to the cut-off measure, let us briefly review his "findings" on another pivotal hypothesis, the *direct relationship*.[7]

Recall that the direct relationship hypothesis posits an inverse correlation between participation in the majority's standard of living and someone's resources. Townsend further refines this hypothesis into two sub-hypotheses. The first, *resources and multiple deprivations*, posits that those lacking necessary resources are likely to face various and intersecting kinds of deprivations. The second, *resources and cumulative deprivations*, posits that the level of deprivation becomes more comprehensive and intense as resources decrease.

Consistent with direct relationship, Townsend's analysis indicated a correlation between declining income and increasing deprivation. Supporting the hypothesis of resources and cumulative deprivations, he observed heightened deprivation at lower income levels among households of different sizes (Townsend, 1979: 252-255). Regarding resources and multiple deprivations, he "found" that a significant number, forty-four out of sixty indicators, were strongly

---

[6] For example, Piachaud claims that indicators 7, 8, 9, and 11 of his index of relative deprivation (see ***Table 4.2***) "may be as much to do with tastes as with poverty. Not having a cooked breakfast, for example, is often a remedy for overindulgence on other occasions" (Piachaud, 1993[1981]: 117).

[7] I did not find any mentions of the test's results regarding the *proportional but gradual* hypothesis.

correlated (Townsend 1979: 532-535; Appendix Thirteen). This suggests that not only does relative deprivation escalate with fewer resources, but also that those at the lower end of the resource spectrum face multiple deprivations.

We will now delve deeper into how Townsend operationalized the most critical of his theory's hypotheses, the point of disproportion.

4.2.4. Procedures for calculating the cut-off measure

With the necessary elements in place, we can now present what is commonly known as "Townsend's measure of poverty," the cut-off measure. This measure should enable him to operationalize his conception of poverty as relative deprivation. More precisely, should enable him to test the hypothesis that there is a point in the scale of resource distribution where participation in the majority's standard of living begins to decrease disproportionately.

Townsend's procedure involves the following three steps (1979: 259): (1) Rank households according to their resources. (2) Check their level of relative deprivation. (3) Check whether there is a threshold below which people are disproportionately relatively deprived and draw the line at this point. Step (3) tests the point of disproportion hypothesis. If its results are positive, then we would find where to set the poverty line, with those below it considered in poverty (see ***Figure 4***).

The next step involves performing analytical tasks in poverty research, this time using the cut-off measure. Among these tasks are "to estimate the numbers in the population at different levels of living, particularly the numbers living in poverty or on the margins of it," and "to find what are the characteristics and problems of those in poverty and thus contribute to the development of an explanation for poverty" (Townsend, 1979: 93).

Before mentioning some of these "findings," let me note something about how we can interpret the cut-off measure according to CRP measurement theory. In the cut-off measure, two stages of CRP – the representation and applying procedures – mix. In other words, the cut-off measure is not a static metric but rather a series of processes. This is an instance of the observation made by CRP's developers, as well as by Adcock and Collier, that in a good measure, the practices of conceptualization, representation, and applying procedures are iterative. In the cut-off measure, the specific level at which the poverty line is settled is a variable itself, sensitive to evolving standards of living and economic conditions. This is why I think it fits to say that Townsend's

approach is empirically based, meaning that it is set in a way that the level at which we draw the poverty line is responsive to data.

Of course, this does not imply a naive empiricism that eschews theory in the name of something like "what the data say." [8] In fact, some researchers call this approach as theory driven (Nájera & Gordon, 2023). This characterization is apt given the theoretical apparatus (of middle-range) we have been discussing, encompassing his conception, hypotheses, and observations. However, other approaches that also exhibit sophisticated theoretical apparatus are not empirically driven in the sense of setting procedures to find the poverty line. For instance, the capability approach is animated by a sophisticated set of conceptions and underpinning moral and political theories. Also, this approach typically employs axiomatic measures based on formal advances that deepened our understanding of the properties of several measures, as well as of how they relate with what features the concept of poverty has. But in this approach, validation is mainly conceptual in the case of the capability approach and deductive in the case of axiomatic measures (***Section 2.2.2***) . This differs significantly from Townsend's attitude toward validating poverty measures. Indeed, this difference is recognized by those researchers that adopt the capability approach and operationalize it axiomatically, as they often refer to measures inspired by Townsend's as "statistical approaches" in contrast to their own approach (Alkire *et al.*, 2015: 86-90).[9]

Further "findings." An important aspect of the cut-off measure involves providing an "objective" parameter to evaluate the outcomes generated by subjective measures. Recall that one of the hypotheses of Townsend's theory posits that the official standard (the state measure) places the poverty line below the objective poverty line, specifically beneath the point of disproportion (***Section 3.2.1.a***). Indeed, if you look at the ***Figure 4*** above, Townsend's results suggest that "below 150 per cent of the supplementary benefit standard [the state measure], deprivation begins to increase swiftly" (Townsend, 1979: 261). This implies that the UK's official measure settled

[8] This is why I believe the term "empirically based" is more appropriate than "evidence based." Using the former can help avoid associations with the evidence-based policy movement, and its tendency to consciously avoid basing research on theories or even models (Deaton & Cartwright, 2017), something very different from Townsend's effort to develop a middle-range *theory* of poverty.

[9] Alkire *et al.* notes that typical statistical methods applied in poverty measurement include cluster analysis, principal and multiple correspondence analysis, latent class analysis, factor analysis, and structural equation models (Alkire *et al.*, 2015: 86-90). See also this thesis' ***Conclusion, iii***.

the poverty line below the objectively defined point of disproportion – or at least this was "suggested" in a "tentative" manner by the cut-off measure as calculated by Townsend.

Now, let us compare the extent of poverty according to the cut-off measure with the other two subjective measures: the state measure and the relative measure. According to the state measure, 7% of households were in poverty, with an additional 24% on its margins, translating to 3,320,000 people living in poverty. Using the relative income standard, a slightly higher 10.5% of households fell below the poverty line, equivalent to 5 million individuals. However, when using the cut-off measure, a striking 25% of households were in poverty, affecting a substantial 12,460,000 people (Townsend, 1979: 301-302).

Another significant "finding" was that the level at which deprivation disproportionately escalates varies across different social groups – especially across "social minorities" in Townsend's sense (Townsend, 1979: 301-302). For instance, the threshold for deprivation is notably higher for households with children and for those that have members with disabilities. Poverty also strongly correlates with specific social classes, ages, and family compositions. Unskilled manual workers and their dependents experience the highest incidence of poverty. Poverty is more prevalent in children than in adults under retirement, in women than in men, in separated and widowed than married and unmarried people, in the self-employed than the employed, and in dependent than the employed. Notably, the retired population exhibited the highest proportion of poverty. Unfortunately, due to sample limitations in the PITUK survey, Townsend was unable to draw conclusions regarding differences between immigrant and ethnic minorities.

Lastly, concerning the relationship between poverty and the different kinds of resources, as we would expect, the extent of poverty worsens when considering non-income resources. Indeed, there is a strong inverse correlation between asset ownership and poverty: over half of those who are in poverty or on the brink of poverty possess no assets at all (Townsend, 1979: 295; see also ***Table 3.1***, "Capital Assets"). Townsend says that lacking assets is "perhaps the single most notable feature of the poor" (1979: 921).

Now, let us look at the tool he deployed to gather the data required by his conception of poverty, the PITUK survey.

4.3. Survey

To put the aforementioned indexes into operation, Townsend required the relevant data on the resources and standard of living of people in the UK. The *survey method*, a central tool in his endeavor, was employed for this purpose, as indicated in PITUK's subtitle: *A Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living*. Its design was intended to ensure reliability and, more important than anything else, validity in line with Townsend's comprehensive conceptions of resources and standard of living. While the debate about survey validity and reliability has evolved enormously since this survey from the late 1960s, my objective here is not to assess it by current standards but to illustrate how the survey occupies a central place in his theory of poverty. In fact, the survey can also be regarded as an argument or rationale for his middle-range theory of poverty.

To finish this chapter, I will first place this survey in the broader context of the history of poverty measurement, then present its general characteristics, and briefly discuss its reliability and validity.

4.3.1. The survey method and the British tradition of social research

The products of a survey (answers to questionnaires) provide the raw data informing measures and theories about social phenomena like poverty. In CRP vocabulary, surveys are tools for collecting relevant items to feed into a given measure. Accordingly, in PITUK, the survey's design and execution were intended to be in the right relationship with the two other elements of a good measure: its conception and representation.

The development and conducting of social surveys have historically been intertwined with poverty measurement. We have seen how the surveys by Booth and Rowntree on poverty in the UK were key steps in the development of social science. Among the distinctive features of these surveys, it is the fact that they were designed with the two researchers' purpose in mind. Booth and Rowntree, as industrialists, had the resources to hire teams for conducting these surveys according to their own purposes and conceptions.

We have mentioned that this level of control over their design and execution is uncommon in social research (***Section 2.2.3.a***), as researchers rarely have the resources required for designing and executing their own surveys. More common is that they rely on secondary data from institutions – typically statistical offices – produced with different purposes in mind. In fact, prior

to the PITUK survey, Townsend and his colleagues primarily utilized secondary analysis of data from government-designed surveys, like the Family Expenditure Survey, which was used in *The Poor and the Poorest* (1965).[10] This necessitated a creative use of existing data, but naturally imposed significant constraints on their analysis. This is precisely why the PITUK survey is so special.

4.3.2. The PITUK Survey

In the Preface of PITUK, Townsend narrates how he and Abel-Smith secured funding from the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust to plan a large survey, organize its questionnaire, and coordinate the necessary fieldwork. This process was tailored to align with their research interests and theoretical perspectives on poverty. Due to the broad data requirements of Townsend's conception of resources, no research agency had the expertise for interviewing, leading them to recruit a team of researchers coordinated by Townsend himself. In the process, Townsend continues, he faced two major challenges. First, in 1968 Abel-Smith accepted an invitation to work at an important post in the Labour government at that time. Second, the research team faced issues in coding analysis due to the limited availability, then, of computers capable of processing the vast amount of data. Both factors explain, in Townsend's own words, the ten years publication delay of PITUK since the fieldwork's completion.[11]

The survey was conducted in 1968-69. The main survey collected data from all constituencies (electoral areas) in the UK, encompassing 2,052 households and 6,098 individuals. Local surveys in poor areas of four parliamentary constituencies – Salford, Neath, Glasgow, and Belfast – gathered data from 1,208 households and 3,950 individuals. The rationale behind the survey is painstakingly detailed and discussed in PITUK's chapter 3, entitled "Methods of Research." The procedures, as well as a reproduction of the questionnaires from both surveys are found in the thirteen (sic) appendixes that close the book (1979: 927-1176).

[10] The Family Expenditure Survey ran from 1961-2001 and collected information on food consumption and expenditure with the goal of producing the UK's Retail Price Index. For more information about it, see Office for National Statistics (n.d.).

[11] The large list of interviewers and data analysts can be found in the Preface of PITUK. While the bulk of the book was Townsend's responsibility, it is quite reductionist to claim that this monumental work was solely his authorship.

4.3.3. Validity and reliability

Now, a brief comment on survey reliability. Even though it might sound obvious, Townsend's primary motivation for employing the survey was to obtain *representative* evidence of Briton's resources and styles of living. After all, he assumed the diversity inherent in any society, necessitating that sociological research rely on representative samples of the populations being studied (***Section 3.2***).

To ensure representativeness, he employed a multi-stage approach in sampling and stratification techniques, incorporating both broad regional stratification and detailed local criteria (1979: 98-100; Appendix One). The goal was to capture a sample as representative as possible of the UK's diverse income groups and to include typically underrepresented populations. Here is a summary of each stage:

- ***Initial Stratification:*** The UK's 630 parliamentary constituencies were divided into ten regions and then categorized into three income-based strata: high, middle, and low. From these, fifty-one constituencies were selected to ensure a spread across income groups.
- ***Secondary Stratification within Constituencies:*** Within the selected constituencies, wards were stratified based on the proportion of the population aged 25 and over who left school at 15 or under, using census data. This stratification would allow for a more nuanced sampling within income groups, addressing variations in educational attainment.
- ***Sampling in Four Poor Areas:*** For the sampling in Salford, Neath, Glasgow, and Belfast areas, information from the census and local councils regarding wards within these areas was used to identify the poorest wards based on criteria like the percentage of adults who left school early, the percentage of children receiving free school meals, and the average value of dwellings, from which further samples of addresses were drawn.

To compile a comprehensive and up-to-date list of addresses, including those less likely to be captured (like itinerants), access to electoral registration officers' records was obtained with permission from the UK Home Secretary. These records included "partly built" and "empty" addresses.

Despite these efforts, the survey encountered significant limitations, such as a high non-response rate (1979: 111-113). To mitigate this issue, the results were cross-checked with a series

of administrative sources, including those produced by the previously mentioned *Royal Commission* (1979: 110-111; Appendix Two).[12] As Townsend states at the beginning of the book:

> Although I have drawn on a number of studies carried out in the 1970s, and on the reports in 1975, 1976 and 1977 of the Royal Commission on the Distribution of Income and Wealth, the principal source of information is the national survey carried out for the specific purpose of writing this book in 1968-9. (Townsend, 1979: 17)

The questionnaire's validity was a crucial concern, given Townsend's comprehensive conceptions of resources and style of living. A somewhat long and fascinating comment about the design and rationale of it is detailed in Appendix Nine (1979: 1076-1083). Its sections and questions were based on "pilot research into minority groups who had not been studied intensively hitherto" and were proportionally poorer than the general population (1979: 93).[13] The questionnaire covered sections on "housing and living facilities, employment, occupational facilities and fringe benefits, cash income, assets and savings, health and disability, social services, private income in kind and style of living" (1979: 94). Further, they included questions about people's attitudes on poverty and their beliefs about their own situations and the state of deprivation of Britain.

Given the extensive data for Townsend's broader conceptions, he and his team faced a common challenge in questionnaire application. He notes that "[s]urvey directors assume … that every section of the population will understand approximately the same questions and provide an appropriate range of answers" (1979: 114). This assumption is problematic because, similar to the term "poverty," different individuals may interpret the same concepts differently. To mitigate this issue and enhance validity, a survey must not only have a well-designed questionnaire but also

---

[12] See note 4 in this ***Chapter 4***.

[13] This means that Townsend relied on pilot research based on pre-existing notions (such as groups already considered poor), to develop his own conception of poverty and other relevant conceptions. Essentially, Townsend used existing conceptions as a foundation for his new theory. While this approach is common in the social sciences, it risked inadvertently shaping his conceptions with the conventional views that Townsend precisely sought to question. Townsend acknowledged this difficulty in developing his broader conception of resources, highlighting the challenge of creating an alternative measure of inequality without depending on conventional and familiar views about this concept (Townsend, 1979: 232). This dilemma mirrors Abraham Kaplan's "paradox of conceptualization" (1999 [1964]: 52-54), which states that while adequate concepts are essential for formulating a theory, a solid theory is necessary to develop adequate concepts. Kaplan claims that the only way out of this is an iterative process where improved concepts lead to better theories, subsequently refining concepts further. Such a cycle would ensure that new theories are progressively more precise and effective. Alexandrova notes this coherentist rationale is not exclusive to the social sciences. Recent work in philosophy of measurement argues that this iterative approach is also common even when in the measurement of physical quantities (Alexandrova, 2017: 124-125).

effective interview procedures that minimize misunderstandings. Another aspect impacting the survey's validity is its ability to reflect the dynamic nature of Townend's conception of poverty (***Section 3.1.1.b***). Townsend suggested that ideally, cohort studies should be conducted to monitor a specific group in the population over time, capturing changes and trends. However, such longitudinal studies were not implemented in PITUK (1979: 114).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented the four poverty measures used in PITUK, highlighting that Townsend considers only the relative deprivation and cut-off measures to be objective. I detailed his procedures for deriving the index of total resources, a process that involved reducing five kinds of resources into a single metric. Next, I described his procedures for deriving an "illustrative index" of relative deprivation, comprising twelve indicators selected from an initial list of sixty. According to this measure, individuals scoring five or more out of these twelve indicators are classified as relatively deprived. Furthermore, I discussed the controversial notion of a national majority's standard of living within Britain's diverse styles of living. Critics have drawn parallels to Townsend's earlier critiques of Rowntree, questioning the sixty indicators Townsend selected to gauge relative deprivation. Key findings from the research were also highlighted. Moreover, I provided an overview of the PITUK survey, emphasizing the challenges Townsend and his team encountered during its execution.

I argued that the cut-off measure is empirically driven, with the point to settle the poverty line being determined by the data on people's resources and their relative deprivation. It is the cut-off measure that, so to speak, bridges the gap between the rawest empirical data and the most abstract components of Townsend's middle-range theory. Accordingly, I now turn to the part of the theory that aims to link poverty with the broader phenomenon of social stratification: his explanation of poverty.

CHAPTER 5
An Explanation of Poverty

Introduction

In the literature, much less discussed than his conception and measure of poverty is Townsend's explanation of the phenomenon. This is in stark contrast with the relevance that Townsend himself gives to the matter. In fact, the bulk of the more than one thousand pages of PITUK are concerned with laying out the causes of poverty. Therefore, it may be worthwhile to present the explanation of poverty – that is, its causes – according to Townsend's theory. This is the objective of this chapter.

To start, the words of T. H. Marshall in his review of PITUK are once more worth reading:

> It is a vital element in his [Townsend] approach to insist that poverty is an integral part of the structure of stratification and cannot be understood apart from it – and stratification is a system of inequalities. But he does not on that account abandon the concept of poverty, which he sees as a stratum with a particular character of its own. (Marshall, 1981: 82)

T. H. Marshall here refers to two traditional attitudes found in the social sciences when investigating poverty: reducing poverty to inequality or treating it as a phenomenon with distinct features yet somewhat disconnected from social stratification. Townsend's theory intends to be different: while poverty is *not* reduced to inequality, to put it somewhat crudely, poverty is ultimately a *by-product* of inequality in access to resources (1979: 33; 57). Or, to use Townsend's own words:

> … the denial by major nongovernmental as well as government institutions of access of certain kinds of people to earnings or earnings substitutes, the structuring of the resource systems in relation to social stratification and even the evolution and structure of the wage system attracted little attention [both from economists and sociologists]. (Townsend, 1979: 61)

We can also read this passage in terms of Townsend's theory of poverty being a middle-range theory: a theory that accounts for the particular features of this phenomenon and also connects it to an object of broad-range theory, that is, the structure of social stratification. Below, I sort out Townsend's explanation of poverty. The causes of poverty originate from the two elements of his conception: the unequal distribution of *resources* and the dynamics of the *standard of living*.

Social classes are the primary factors that mediate individuals' access to resources within a society. But classes function in tandem with *institutions* that regulate both the production and allocation of resources. We have seen that income is a significant yet not the sole kind of resource in the theory. Accordingly, an explanation of poverty must also consider how other kinds of resources like wealth are unequally distributed. Additionally, Townsend's explanation considers the causes of poverty for groups he refers to as "*social minorities*." Members of these groups are sidelined from the wage economy, hence demanding that we look for systems of resource distribution beyond the wage system. Some of these are children, unpaid housewives, the elderly, people with disabilities, and ethnic minorities.

Regarding dynamics of the standard of living, a full explanation of poverty must address the different styles of living one finds in a society. For Townsend, these styles mirror the differential access to resources. However, remember that relative deprivation is not limited to specific styles of life but pertains to a national majority's standard. This standard is something to which all social classes, the rich and the poor, are expected to follow. It is part of an explanation of poverty to account for how this national style of living emerges.

Townsend's theoretical approach is rooted in class relations. He defines social classes as "segments of the population sharing broadly similar types and levels of resources, with broadly similar styles of living and some perception of their collective condition" (Townsend, 1979: 370). In Townsend's theory, classes have explanatory precedence over alternative factors, such as status or a person's human capital.[1] His theory is also structural, which Townsend understood in two senses. It is structural in an ontological sense, since the causes of poverty are not intrinsic to individuals but reside in the processes that connect them to systems of resource distribution. It is also structural in an epistemic sense, as the causes of poverty are opaque to common sense unless we develop a systematic, scientific theory of it.

***

[1] John Goldthorpe argues that since Townsend's PITUK, the analysis of poverty in Britain has prioritized class as an explanatory factor. More precisely, poverty has been considered the result of institutional social relations that dictate resource distribution (Goldthorpe 2009: 735). In favor of this perspective, Goldthorpe claims that there is recent evidence that household poverty risk is primarily linked to the class of the household head, even when accounting for his or her educational attainment. One way of interpreting this is that class has explanatory precedence over other factors.

Sections' outline

This chapter presents Townsend's explanation of poverty in three sections. ***Section 5.1*** outlines the explanation, showing how causes of poverty stem from the elements of his conception. In ***Section 5.2***, I discuss two distinctive features of the explanation. First, its causes are structural, in the sense of being non-individualistic and opaque to commonsense. Second, a person's command over resources takes explanatory precedence over other causes of poverty, like status. The chapter concludes with ***Section 5.3***, summarizing the key elements and processes that underpin the explanation of poverty.

5.1. Outlining the explanation

The main source for this discussion of Townsend's explanation of poverty is PITUK. It is true that in another major work, *The International Analysis of Poverty* (1993), he expands his analysis of poverty from the UK to a global context. But the core of the theory remains the same in both works. In fact, Townsend had already stated in PITUK that its framework is applicable both to so-called "First World" and "Third World" countries.[2] The difference lies in the scope of the systems analyzed. Instead of national systems of resource distribution, in 1993 Townsend examines *global* systems, such as international agencies and transnational corporations, that contribute to global inequality.

Townsend's explanation of poverty consists of systematic propositions about the causes of this phenomenon. To understand them, it is useful to first make some remarks about the nature of explanation. It helps to compare it with its contrasting class, namely, a description. Providing a *description* is, roughly, to establish the relevant features of a natural or social phenomenon. In contrast, providing causes for a natural or social phenomenon is one of the canonical ways in which philosophers understood providing an *explanation*. Our phenomenon of interest is poverty. Therefore, by providing a conception and measure of poverty, Townsend aims to develop the most

[2] One reads that "[u]ntil social scientists can provide the rigorous conception within which the poverty of industrial societies and the Third World can *both* be examined, and the relationship between inequality and poverty perceived, the accumulation of data and the debates about the scale and causal antecedents of the problem will in large measure be fruitless" (Townsend, 1979: 60; my emphasis).

adequate tools for capturing the causes – its explanation – of the relevant features of poverty – its description.[3]

The *extent* and *severity of poverty* are some of the relevant features of poverty that Townsend aims to explain. At its more abstract level, an explanation of poverty is concerned with what he refers to below:

> In all societies, there is a crucial relationship between the production, distribution and redistribution of resources on the one hand and the creation or sponsorship of style of living on the other. One governs the resources which come to be in the control of individuals and families. The other governs the 'ordinary' conditions and expectations attaching to membership of society, the denial or lack of which represents deprivation. The two are in constant interaction and explain at any given moment historically both the level and extent of poverty. (1979: 917)

Hence, more abstractly, the causes of poverty lie in three processes:

- *how a society's resources are produced and distributed;*
- *how a society's standard of living originates and spreads through society;*
- *how the distribution of a society's resources interacts with this society's standard of living.*

These processes are related to the two elements of his conception of poverty: resources and a society's standard of living. This is one of the senses in which, Townsend argues, only through adequate conceptions and adequate measures of both elements can we adequately explain poverty (1979: 40; 64; 113; 915-916). And remember, "adequate" here means, *inter alia*, satisfying comprehensiveness, namely, taking into account its several dimensions (1979: 1; 33; 38; 45; 57).

The substantive part of the explanation is then filling into the details of these three processes. More precisely, Townsend states as the theory's priorities to establish these four processes (1979: 87-88):

[3] An important caveat. I use these notions without assuming any commitment to specific accounts of scientific explanation. More precisely, I am not assuming that all explanations are of a causal nature; that is, I do not take a stance in the debate over whether, beyond causal explanations, there are also functional or intentional ones. Further, I am not ascribing to a specific model of scientific explanation – that is, I am not ascribing to the deductive-nomological, statistical, mechanical, unificationist, or pragmatic model of explanation. For an introduction to these and related questions, I refer the reader to Woodward and Ross (2021).

- how the different systems of resource distribution allocate not only income but different resources for different groups in society;
- how a society's resource distribution causes different groups in the population to have different styles of living;
- how entities like class and minority groups are mediators between differences in access to resources and differences in styles of living;
- how, among different styles of living, a unified society's standard of living emerges.[4]

With these broad points in mind, let me present what one might take as the distinctive features of Townsend's theory of poverty.

5.2. Distinctive features

Townsend distinguishes his theory in two key ways: first, it is structural; and second, it gives explanatory precedence to command over resources rather than status or prestige. Let us see each in turn.

5.2.1. Structural theory

The meanings commonly attributed to "structural" explanations or "structural" approaches in the social sciences are disputed matters, and it is not my goal here to discuss them. I am interested only in showing that Townsend's theory is structural in two senses: one *ontological* and the other *epistemic*.

Let us start with the ontological sense. Townsend refers to his theoretical framework as a "structural approach" to poverty (1993: 101-106). The relevant contrast class here is an

[4] Townsend's theory of poverty is profoundly sociological insofar as it places poverty within the broader framework of social stratification. In his own words, "[a]ny explanation of the fact that the poor receive an unequal share of resources must be related to the larger explanation of social inequality" (Townsend, 1979: 33). Let us think about what the sociologists David Grusky and Manway Ku claim that social stratification is mostly concerned with. They say that its three main objects are: (1) processes that determine which goods or resources are deemed valuable and desirable; (2) the allocation rules that distribute these resources across various societal positions – mainly but not exclusively occupational classes, such as doctors, farmers, and "housewives" – within the social structure; and (3) the mechanisms that link individuals to these social roles, leading to unequal control over valued resources. Now, compare them with the four processes we have just mentioned. It is possible to interpret (1) as related to the causes of styles of living; (2) as related to the process of resource distribution and their relationship with entities like classes; and (3) as related to the causes of someone being part of a given class or group.

"individualistic approach," according to which the causes of poverty lie in the features of people that are poor. Townsend discusses two such approaches. One is the "sub-culture of poverty," which posits that "the poorest section of society forms a sub-society or a sub-culture which is distinctive and largely self-perpetuating" (Townsend, 1979: 65). Accordingly, the causes of poverty would lie in the behaviors of these people. The other is what he calls "orthodox economic approach," which traces the causes of poverty to the lack of productive capacity of individuals that, as a consequence, do not supply employers' demand for workers' ability (1979: 71). Townsend cites a passage from an enthusiast of this approach: "If an individual's income is too low, his productivity is too low. His income can be increased only if his productivity can be raised." [5] The components of productivity would include education, skill, ability, and, in the most sophisticated version of this approach, human capital (1979: 74). In Townsend's words, the orthodox approach treats the demand side as exogenous, that is, institutional and historical variations among societies are taken as constants and not as explanatory factors themselves. For him, this reflects a prioritization of simplicity – an epistemic value potentially at odds with his emphasis on comprehensiveness – in theorizing about poverty. And because institutional structures are viewed as constants, the focus shifts to how *individuals* make choices within these structures. Specifically, the approach looks at how people decide in relation to education, training, and mobility, factors that are then seen as key to individual success and societal contribution (1979: 74).

In contrast, a structural approach posits that the causes of poverty do not lie in individuals but in the rules of institutions and occupations, and in the processes of resource distribution. In our former example, a worker's productivity is now taken as a function of his or her class. This is because her class determines the allocation of social resources related to self-investment and differential access to various types of resources. All this contributes to the causes of workers' "share of the final product" (1979: 78). Additionally, the worker's income constitutes only a part of her resources, as the system that distributes wages is one of the different systems of resource distribution.[6]

---

[5] To wit, Thurow, L. C., Poverty and Discrimination (1969: 26, *apud* Townsend, 1979: 74).

[6] Note that this relates to the question of the appropriate level of explanation for social phenomena. Methodological individualists, broadly speaking, argue that macro-level relationships need to be in some way underpinned by micro-level relationships, typically understood as individuals' actions. The interpretation of "in some way" varies, and there are different views on how this requirement should be met. Holists deny that this is an adequate requirement. In

Now, let us look at how Townsend's theory is structural in an epistemic sense. This is related to his emphasis on the differences between subjective and objective views about poverty that we have discussed above (***Sections 3.1.1.c*** and ***3.1.1.d***). For him, only a scientific approach to poverty could find several and crucial aspects of the phenomenon, as these aspects are not available to commonsensical or superficial accounts of it. The structure of poverty, then, is *epistemically opaque*. To understand this, let me refer to a possible objection to PITUK's conclusions that Townsend's advance in the Preface. We have seen above that the conclusions of the book came to light more than ten years after its survey was originally conducted. In the meantime, British society suffered a series of changes in people's styles of living and modes of interaction:

> People are conscious of the rapid spread of car ownership, colour television, telephones, central heating, hi-fi equipment and air travel; the introduction of new methods of production in industry and new drugs and surgical techniques in medicine; new fashions as well as materials and processes in the clothes that are worn and the goods and furnishings that are bought for the home; new types of musical and theatrical entertainment; and an array of new bodies, controls and procedures brought into existence by legislation. (Townsend, 1979: 18)

Does this imply that PITUK's conclusions are no longer valid? Townsend argues that this is not the case. Despite these societal changes, he points out that certain factors in British society remain unchanged or stable. These factors are precisely those that are structural, and these are those factors that for him have stayed largely unchanged over these ten years. The most important of these factors are how the command over resources is distributed unequally in a society, and how this unequal distribution is mainly mediated by social classes. This is the reason for the enduring relevance of PITUK's conclusions a decade later, or so he argues.

Townsend's theory, we could argue that the functional relationships between resources and levels of deprivation would be an instance of the macro-level explanations, while anthropological observations like social integration an instance of the micro-level explanations (***Section 3.2***). Does this mean that Townsend adopts methodological individualism? How could this be reconciled with his critique of individualist explanations of poverty? A form of individualism known as "structural individualism," may offer the answer. According to Mateus Leite (2021), this form of individualism does not assume some of the main problematic stances of other forms of methodological individualism. Leite argues that structural individualism does not assume an atomistic perspective of behavior, acknowledges the influence of macro-level phenomena such as norms, culture, or institutions on individual behavior, and does not automatically subscribe to contentious theories of human action, such as rational choice theory. Still, structural individualists insist that macro-level claims need proper grounding at the micro-level, meaning there must be a way to show how individuals' actions and beliefs lead from one macro state to another. Arguably, Townsend's anthropological observations may offer such micro-foundations. For an in-depth discussion, see Demeulenaere (2011: introduction) and Leite's thesis on this matter (2021).

Let me explore this point a bit further. For Townsend, one reason we might overlook a society's structural stability is the timespan. Changes may be temporary or cyclical. In societies with class or group conflicts, any advantage gained by one group may be temporary and subject to reversal by opposing groups over time.[7] Worse, Townsend continues, there are factors that contribute to the proliferation of short-term, partial, and superficial views about phenomena such as poverty. Groups and interests often work, consciously or not, to obscure inequality. Those who gain the most from it tend to either ignore inequality or rationalize it as justified or minimal. In turn, these perspectives are mirrored in policymaking and affect how social research is conducted and presented.

So, Townsend's theory is structural in two ways: ontologically, as it offers structural rather than individualistic explanations of poverty; and epistemically, as it uncovers causes of poverty that are opaque to commonsense explanations.

These two senses of "structural" are related in an interesting way. What Townsend means by a "structural account" is deeply related to what Hoyningen-Huene (2013) claims about the systematic character of scientific theories. Remember that Hoyningen-Huene argues that scientific systematicity is better understood in contrast with commonsensical forms of knowledge. The latter forms of knowledge fare poorly in the nine dimensions of systematicity, which are deeply related with Townsend's preferred epistemic values. Put this way, given his pursuit of epistemic values, Townsend's theory of poverty aims to provide an account that likely differs from unsystematic claims about the phenomenon. Additionally, it is no accident that the prevalence of some of these unsystematic claims can be attributed to contextual values and their influence on social beliefs. Remember, Townsend calls these claims "subjective," and to them, he opposes those claims based on an objective theory of poverty. Thus, we can see how the epistemic structural sense of his theory is closely related with the ontological sense: It is only through science's systematicity that we could arrive or at last start to arrive at society's structure.

[7] The work of contemporary researchers such as Thomas Piketty (2014) may reflect such a belief that important social phenomena can be accessed only through long-term analysis. Indeed, considering Piketty's substantial influence from Tony Atkinson, who was himself influenced by Townsend, it is plausible to suggest that Townsend's ideas have indirectly influenced Piketty's work – or, at the very least, that Piketty's research partially derives from a research tradition that Townsend was a significant member of (***Introduction, ii***).

Before we proceed, let me discuss a possible objection to this way of relating Townsend's ontological and epistemic sense of a structural explanation. One can accept, first, that a common sense's individualistic, non-structural explanation of poverty is the result of its lack of systematicity; and second, also accepts that there are non-structural theories of poverty and that these theories are, for that reason, wrong. However, one can deny that the reason for these individualistic theories being wrong is related to why common sense's explanations are wrong. After all, this objection claims, there are systematic theories of poverty that are nonetheless individualistic.

My response is that we can interpret Townsend as arguing that individualistic theories of poverty are simply not systematic. They lack or perform poorly on those epistemic values that systematicity requires. For instance, Townsend criticizes a then popular individualistic explanation of poverty arguing that it suffered from ambiguity, lack of evidence, lack of logical consistency, and lack of reliability because, *inter alia*, it did not deploy the survey method and it was quite difficult to test (Townsend, 1979: 67-70).[8] In a nutshell, for him individualistic explanations such as these result precisely from their lack of systematicity.[9]

Now, let us move to the second distinctive feature of Townsend's theory.

5.2.2. The explanatory precedence of control over resources

We have mentioned that the structural aspects of a society (which are more stable than superficial aspects) concern the distribution of command over resources. They also concern the factors that mediate these resources and the individuals that receive them. The primary factors among these are social classes.

In the explanation of poverty, these factors also have a special status. According to Townsend, command over resources takes explanatory precedence over other factors, or, to put in

[8] Note that if Townsend's theory is compatible with structural individualism (see note 6 in this ***Chapter 5***), this does not mean that his theory is individualistic in the sense that he criticizes. This is so because, first, structural individualism does not necessarily lead to "individualistic" explanations, and second, because the systematic nature of Townsend's theory does not lead to an inadequate explanation – or so he argues.

[9] Systematicity is primarily an epistemic notion. This aligns well with my interpretation that Townsend's emphasis is on providing not a "true" theory of poverty, but a theory that is epistemically sound, namely, one that is systematic (***Section 2.2.4***).

other words, they dominate other factors.[10] What are the explanatory factors that contrast with command over resources? Townsend has in mind above all the notion of status. This reflects where he puts himself against what he calls the neo-Weberian school of social stratification. In fact, he identifies in the sociology of his time a regrettable prevalence of a neo-Weberian approach.[11] In this approach, roughly speaking, occupations are considered the fundamental units of analysis and are ordered into socioeconomic or prestige scales. Despite occupations playing a role in Townsend's theory, he distinguished them from social classes. To remember, he defines social classes as groups with similar types and levels of resources, styles of life, and a shared awareness of their collective condition (Townsend, 1979: 370). Occupational classes are a *factor* in the determination of class, but only one factor alongside others like "income, wealth, type of tenure of housing, education, style of consumption, mode of behaviour, social origins and family and local connections" (Townsend, 1979: 370).[12]

In distinguishing his approach from this emphasis on status, Townsend identifies his work as following a Marxist tradition. However, he points out two differences between his approach and this tradition. First, he argues that Marx notably did not account for the proliferation of intermediate groups in industrialized societies. Townsend spends a great deal of effort emphasizing how, in the century that followed Marx, intermediate groups (like professionals and managers) arose making a class framework centered only around capitalists lacking explanatory power. In fact, Townsend argues that these intermediate groups are among the distinctive explanatory factors of poverty in modern industrialized societies like Britain. To see this just remember that one of his five kinds of resources is employment benefits in kind, resources distributed through systems mediated by occupations (***Section 3.1.2***). Second, Townsend claims that Marx followed classical economists in the level of granularity that his analysis of resource distribution adopted. In Townsend's words, Marx was mainly concerned with "the aggregate shares of the factors of

[10] The reader may find these descriptions of explanatory primacy somewhat vague. Fisk (1982) provides an interesting proposal to make them more precise, and he does so specifically within the context of Marx's materialism.

[11] As interesting as it may be, to determine where Townsend fits in the current landscape of social stratification schools in sociology is not necessary for the purposes of this thesis.

[12] By moving the focus from occupations to this broader notion of class, Townsend also redirects our attention from solely income to include additional kinds of resources, such as wealth. This shift takes us beyond the wage system to other systemsn of their distribution, like the family.

production," and not with explaining their distribution *within* and *between* classes (Townsend, 1979: 80-81).

Townsend claims that the group he refers to as "neo-Marxists" is not subject to these shortcomings, while also embracing the primacy of resources in their explanations. However, he considers this school of stratification as lacking in several crucial areas. They ignore the peculiar features of the resources of social minorities, as well as restrict themselves to income instead of broadening their analyses to other kinds of resources. More importantly, he criticizes this school for maintaining Marx's basic ideas about classes in a way that is too general and unclear. Regarding this latter point, he is calling for the development of measures that could turn these ideas more amenable to his favorite epistemic values.

This is why Townsend positions himself between the neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian schools of social stratification.[13] In the terms of this thesis, his middle-range theory of poverty as relative deprivation caused by lack of resources was intended to, first, be connected with a broad-range theory of social class of a Marxian stripe. And second, to make these broad ideas more precise and amenable to empirical scrutiny through an appropriate measure of poverty.

5.3. Elements and processes that explain poverty

In this section, my goal is to show to the reader how his middle-range theory connects poverty with broader processes of social stratification and to what Townsend considers the main factors that explain it. An important caveat is that while providing an account of the *elements* and *processes* that explain poverty occupies the bulk of PITUK, I will only present these elements and processes briefly.[14]

I begin by explaining resource distribution, focusing on its main factors: social classes and social institutions, and the processes they mediate. Another aspect of the explanation addresses

[13] Townsend discusses a third school, functionalism, and denies that functionalist explanations are adequate for explaining poverty (1979: 83-87). In a first approximation, functionalism explains objects of social research (like institutions, norms, or phenomena) insofar as they serve a *purpose* and that are indispensable for the long-term survival of the society. I will not discuss whether his conceptualization of functionalism is adequate, but I refer the reader to Daniel Little's account of this school in the social sciences (Little, 1991: ch. 5). Some commentators like T. H. Marshall (1981: 85-86) think that the elements of Townsend's explanation of poverty, contrary to his own statements, flirt with functionalism. Indeed, Pedro de Souza argued that Townsend's theory shares many features with the functionalism of Talcott Parsons. Unfortunately, I will not delve into this topic in this thesis.

[14] Townsend offers a concise yet comprehensive account of his explanation of poverty in (1979: 916-922).

how people from social minorities, lacking access to the wage system, are either granted access to resources or excluded from them. Furthermore, the section will discuss the explanation of differences in styles of living and how these relate to differences in access to resources. The final element of the explanation must show how poverty's basal space emerges; put another way: it must explain how, from these diverse styles of living, a national style of living that all in society, both rich and poor, are expected to follow emerges.

5.3.1. Inequality in access to resources

As previously mentioned, Townsend's conception of *social classes* is broader than the sociological notion of occupations. Classes encompass not only an individual's occupation but also their income, wealth, education, style of living, family, and community (Townsend, 1979: 370). It is true that, for him, occupations account for the scope and values of people's earnings and, in fact, the PITUK survey "found" that differences in occupational rank are highly correlated with differences in levels of deprivation in work.[15] However, if we look only at occupations, Townsend adds, we consider only the wage system, which, important as it is, is mainly responsible for distributing only one kind of resource: income.

To explain the unequal access to non-income related resources like wealth, we must consider that a person's class influences not just her net income (which is, to recall, "income after direct taxes and the receipt of cash benefits," Townsend, 1979: 125), but also her ability to: accumulate wealth, to access educational and professional credentials, and to cope with life's instabilities. In this sense, someone's occupation is a product of their class. For instance, wealthy families often provide their children with superior education, aiding them in climbing the occupational ladder. These children also benefit from continued material support and stability at crucial points in their professional lives. Moreover, the family plays a pivotal role in accessing wealth given that inheritance is a key factor in its accumulation, leading to what Townsend calls "the resilience of fortunes" in Britain (1979: 921).

[15] For instance, we have seen that children of unskilled manual workers are more likely to be in poverty (***Section 4.2.4***).

In short, classes mediate people's access to the production and distribution of resources in society. But during the development of societies, *social institutions* arise to reinforce the rules of access to this production and distribution. Some institutions are linked to the productive process, such as the financial and labor markets. Other institutions are independent of production and are related to governmental, bureaucratic, and professional bodies. Agencies of the state, unions, industrial boards, and the government determine differences in wages, salaries, employment benefits, social benefits, as well as their evolution. Both kinds of institutions account for hierarchies in levels of income, profit, and status. Townsend argues that these institutions primarily act to channel resources to their members and the groups they represent, while also presenting these processes as legitimate and just. Regarding elite institutions, he contends that there is an "*active* defence and promotion by the rich of their resources and interests" (Townsend, 1979: 366; original emphasis). This is why, for him, "[t]o comprehend and explain poverty is also to comprehend and explain riches" (Townsend, 1979: 338).

An explanation of poverty should also consider the access (or lack of access) to resources by social minorities, such as ethnic minorities, children, unpaid care workers, retired individuals, and people with disabilities. Due to limitations in the PITUK survey, ethnic minorities such as immigrants from India, Pakistan, and the African continent were not extensively analyzed. However, Townsend dedicates considerable discussion to the predicaments of children, unpaid care workers such as unemployed housewives, elderly retired people, and people with disabilities.

Townsend distinguishes these social minorities into two groups: *dependents* of wage earners and *non-dependents*. Starting with the latter, among the non-dependents, the main groups consist of retired elderly individuals who receive pensions, and people with disabilities who are entitled to sick pay or other forms of social benefits. Within the dependent we find children and adults that are unpaid care workers, such as housewives. Other adult dependents include people with disabilities and the elderly who lack pensions or social benefits.

We have seen that the PITUK survey "found" that social minorities are disproportionately affected by relative deprivation (***Section 4.2.4***). For Townsend, the causes for this are not, in the case of dependents, only the low amounts paid to their family earners. The primary explanation is their *exclusion* from the wage system, coupled with the inadequate amounts of social benefits and

payments they receive from social security.[16] This exclusion stems from the social meanings attached to childhood, marriage, non-productive work, and family. The case of children is particularly noteworthy, as they were excluded from paid work due to the progressive unacceptability of child labor and the simultaneous requirement of school attendance. However, families in poverty either face a lack of income or their social benefits are insufficient to meet the needs of their children.

Townsend makes an interesting further point. Certain forms of protected status can lead to dependence and deprivation if not accompanied by access to the necessary resources. This would be the case of children following the cessation of child labor. Furthermore, in the case of non-dependents, granting rights such as retirement and pensions may appear "entirely reasonable" during periods of economic growth. Yet during economic downturns, the value of these social benefits and their occupational pensions are often eroded by inflation, and their levels are not adequately adjusted by relevant institutions. This is why, he claims, the PITUK survey "found" that elderly people, who were not in poverty during their working lives, often fall into poverty after retirement.

His argument is not aimed at eliminating these protected statuses and rights. Rather, he questions why, in the first place, resources are primarily distributed through the wage system. As we shall see, Townsend advocates for a rebalancing that would enhance child benefits, social security systems, and income schemes for women engaged in unpaid care work.[17] This is why he argues that reducing the disparities between earners and dependents is a critical policy change necessary to eliminate poverty (***Conclusion, ii***).

We now turn to the final element of Townsend's explanation of poverty: the differences in styles of living and the national majority's standard of living.

---

[16] Remember that the cut-off measure establishes the point of disproportion at 150% of the value of the Supplementary Benefit Scale (see ***Figure 4*** in ***Chapter 4***).

[17] This might offer an explanation for a similar process that recently occurred in Brazil. Barbosa *et al.* (2020) showed that during the country's last economic crisis (2012-2018), the social benefit *Programa Bolsa Família* did not effectively function as a safety net for the poor. One of the main reasons for this was the failure to regularly update the transfer amounts during a period of fiscal restraint by the state.

5.3.2. Inequality in styles of living

Roughly speaking, Townsend posits that differences in access to resources lead to differences in people's styles of living. For instance, he claims that occupational classes reflect differences not only in in resource production but also in styles of living (Townsend, 1979: 921). There exists a hierarchical structure in both access to resources and styles of living, and these two processes are interrelated. Contextual values and social beliefs play a significant role in justifying the acceptance of these hierarchies and inequalities. Moreover, the styles of life of the rich receive higher social acknowledgment, while the styles of life of those in poverty are frequently used to justify derogatory views about them and to blame their poverty on their choices.

But poverty is deprivation from the standard of living of an entire society, not just from specific styles of life. Therefore, explaining poverty also requires accounting for how a shared style of life becomes prevalent across a nation. While this aspect may be one of the less developed in Townsend's theory, he posits that social institutions such as churches, media, professional associations, and advertising agencies play a crucial role in this process, as they:

> endeavour to universalize, for example, standards of child care, the practices of marriage and family relationships, reciprocity between neighbours and the treatment of elderly, disabled and blacks. State as well as market agencies are constantly seeking to widen and change modes of consumption and behaviour. A social style of living is cultivated and recommended, in which *both poor and rich are expected to participate*. (Townsend, 1979: 922; my emphasis.)

I have mentioned that in Townsend's theory, relative deprivation is not only determined by the styles of life of the lowest income stratum or the bottom social classes. It concerns deprivation from the standard of living of the entire society, a standard that both the rich and the poor are presumed to share. People with low resources are also expected to participate in the customs and activities, and to possess the items that constitute this standard of living of the entire society. However, Townsend adds that they "cannot buy goods as expensive as those bought by, or live as well as, the rich, but they are *presumed*, none the less, to engage in the same broad scheme of consumption, customs and activities" (Townsend, 1979: 922; my emphasis).

It may seem that the national style of living is predominantly determined by the style of living of the rich. So, beyond favoring a resource distribution that benefits themselves, the rich

also promote a style of living that enhance their status. And this is precisely what Townsend claims:

> More precisely, the rich play a very active part (especially today through 'professional' position) in redefining standards of deprivation and poverty as the years pass. They influence public attitudes to what is accepted as 'deprivation' or 'poverty' or 'adequate living standards' or 'a civilized minimum standard'. They do so increasingly through the authority yielded to them by society by virtue of their professional qualifications and status. This is a second, distinctive, aspect of their power. In some ways they are encouraging a redefinition of poverty. (Townsend, 1979: 367)

Thus, for Townsend, what actually trickle-down is not society's resources, but rich's style of life. This is another sense in which both the level and nature of relative deprivation are socially determined.

This was a broad-brush presentation of Townsend's explanation of poverty. I should note, nonetheless, that he meticulously attempted to trace these elements and processes through official reports, reference works, and primarily through the results of the PITUK survey.[18] Nevertheless, whether he succeeded in this endeavor is a separate question.

Conclusion

Townsend's theory fundamentally regards the causes of poverty as stemming from the two elements of his conception. Poverty is understood as relative deprivation due to a lack of resources, and hence its causes are rooted in the distribution of resources within a society, the emergence of standards of living, and the interplay between these two elements. Furthermore, the causes of poverty are structural, meaning two things. First, they are not attributed to the individuals affected by poverty, leading Townsend to reject individualistic explanations that focus on the characteristics of those that suffer from it. Second, structural causes are opaque to common sense, necessitating systematic scientific investigation for their discovery. Superficial or transient

[18] Despite the pivotal role Townsend attributes to the rich (chapter 9 is dedicated to them), PITUK is primarily a book about deprivation and those in poverty. Several chapters of the book meticulously detail poverty and relative deprivation across various domains – such as work (1979, chapter 12), housing (chapter 13), and environment (chapter 14) –, as well as geographical areas (chapter 15), social minorities (chapter 16), the unemployed and underemployed (chapter 17), low-income individuals (chapter 18), older workers (chapter 19), disabled people and those with long-term illnesses (chapter 20), children with disabilities (chapter 21), single-parent families (chapter 22), and the elderly (chapter 23). He also discusses the welfare state's role in explaining poverty, including the Supplementary Benefit (chapter 24) and means-tested benefits (chapter 25).

changes in economic conditions may obscure underlying stability or cyclical patterns in society, which can only be revealed through more extensive analysis. Additionally, the influence of contextual values often distorts common-sense perceptions about the causes of poverty and hinders scientific inquiry. A theory of poverty must therefore adhere to epistemic values, as only through the systematic approach of science can the structural factors of poverty be uncovered.

Against explanations based on status, Townsend contends that the critical structural cause of poverty is the distribution of command over resources in society. Social class emerges as the most significant mediator between resources and individuals, but institutions such as governments, professional associations, and unions also play a crucial role in resource distribution and its legitimization. Beyond the hierarchical wage system, groups that are excluded from it – referred to by Townsend as "social minorities" like children, unpaid care workers, the elderly, and people with disabilities – face disproportionate relative deprivation. This is explained by societal meanings that exclude them from the labor market and by the insufficiency of the resources channeled through social security and assistance programs. The uneven distribution of resources gives rise to diverse styles of living, while institutions like the church, media, and advertising agencies contribute to the universalization of a standard of living, ultimately determining relative deprivation. Finally, Townsend argues that this process of universalization predominantly extends from the rich to the poor.

All these considerations are a reflection of Townsend's theory placing the origins of poverty within a broader social class framework, drawing inspiration from Marxist theory yet adapting it to contemporary industrial societies. Most importantly, his approach operationalizes previously broad and empirically elusive Marxist statements, subjecting them to his preferred epistemic values, such as testability, explanatory, and predictive power. In this way, Townsend's middle-range theory of poverty aims to bridge the gap between broad-range Marxist theories and empirical data by providing tools – primarily measures – to operationalize theoretical statements and subject them to empirical testing.

With the explanation of poverty, we approach the conclusion of our discussion of the core elements of Townsend's theory. It is time to draw things together in the ***Conclusion***, where I will offer a final overview, present its last element – policy prescriptions –, and make concise remarks on both the strengths and weaknesses of the theory.

CONCLUSION

Beyond providing a description and explanation of poverty, in PITUK Townsend also provides what he regards as his theory's "policy prescriptions." He views these prescriptions as intertwined with the other elements of the theory, arguing that:

> "policy prescriptions permeate conceptualization, measurement and the formulation of theory; alternatively, … the formulation of theory inheres within the conceptualization and measurement of a problem and the application of policy." (Townsend, 1979: 61)

Some critics regard this vindicated integration of policy and theory as an inconsistency in Townsend's theory. T. H. Marshall (1981) argues that Townsend conflates two fundamentally distinct activities: scientific inquiry and policy advocacy. David Piachaud (1993 [1981]) contends that for Townsend's policy advice to be effective, it would require abandoning value-freedom. While I acknowledge these criticisms, in this conclusion my focus is not to pass judgment on their merit. Instead, my only evaluative claim centers on a different aspect of Townsend's theory. Despite any potential flaws, the theory has achieved a significant epistemic value: that of *fruitfulness*. Townsend's work has not only inspired a variety of research programs in poverty measurement; it has also added grist to the mill for those who argue that taking poverty as more than income is far from a trivial observation.

Thus, in the conclusion of this thesis, I do three things: ***(i)*** Recapitulate the main points of the preceding chapters and link Townsend's view on contextual values in science with my claim that his theory is systematic; ***(ii)*** Present and briefly discuss the final element of the theory, namely, its "policy prescriptions;" And ***(iii)*** argue for the theory's fruitfulness.

i) Recapitulation

Throughout this thesis, I have claimed that the theory of poverty that Townsend presents in *Poverty in the United Kingdom* (1979) is systematic. It is systematic in its pursuit of satisfying the epistemic values of explanatory and predictive power, testability, comprehensiveness, and unification. We can interpret it as a middle-range theory, bridging broad theorizing with empirical data. I also argued that Townsend's favored measure of poverty, the cut-off measure, should be considered accordingly. This means that we should look to all the elements that make up what I called "Townsend's theory of poverty." These elements include his conception of poverty;

hypotheses and anthropological observations related to this conception; measures to test these hypotheses; steps to build these measures as well as records of how he pursued them; and an explanation of poverty that links it to broader theories of social inequality. Additionally, this latter element improves the theory's systematicity as it fosters the dimension of unification in Hoyningen-Huene's sense of systematicity.

These elements also align closely with what constitutes a good measure according to the CRP measurement theory. CRP states that a good measure has a conception that makes a concept like poverty more precise; an adequate formal representation of the features of this conception; and a set of procedures to collect and process the relevant data that the measure aims to capture. Moreover, in a good measure each of these elements is supported by solid arguments and there are reasons for taking them as being in the right relationship with each other. In this way, such measure is systematic in the sense of performing better in the following dimensions of Hoyningen-Huene's notion of scientific systematicity: defending knowledge claims and epistemic connectedness. I have tried to show how CRP is more than compatible with Townsend's theory.

Townsend *conceptualizes* poverty as relative deprivation due to a lack of resources. Starting with resources, he states that there are five kinds of them: cash income, capital assets, employment benefits, public social services, and private income in kind. The main reason for this is simple: not just income but all these kinds of resource impact an individual's standard of living.

He precisifies relative deprivation as deprivation from a society's standard of living. He bases this conception by arguing that social needs are basic needs and that deprivation from all needs is relative to the standards of a given society, including physiological ones. Furthermore, he asserts that his conception of relative deprivation is objective, which means that, beyond satisfying epistemic values, it is based on the social structure rather than on individual perceptions. The main reason for this conceptualization lies in what Townsend takes as anthropological observations and hypotheses about the relationship between resources and participation in the standard of living. For him, the most significant anthropological observation is the human need for social integration, which underpins his argument for a conception of poverty that accounts for societal and temporal relativity.

In favor of this conception, he also offers several hypotheses about the interplay between resources and relative deprivation. If, upon testing, the results are positive, the results are positive,

his conception of poverty would have explanatory and predictive power. If not, it would be at least testable. The cornerstone hypothesis is the point of disproportion, which states that there is a point in the resource distribution where relative deprivation increases disproportionately. It is on this hypothesis that the cut-off measure is based. And as a hypothesis, we need tools to test it.

Here, enters the role of *representations* of his conception of resources and of relative deprivation. Both conceptions are multidimensional, which means that to measure someone's total resources and general relative deprivation, Townsend must build an index for each.

He established and executed a series of *procedures* to collect and process relevant data. To gather the data, he designed and conducted a survey whose questionnaire was developed with consideration for the kind of information required by his broad conceptions of resources and relative deprivation. An important aspect of the survey was identifying indicators that represent the various dimensions of the latter conception. This involved determining how many indicators a person must score to be considered relatively deprived, and thereby allowing us to assess her level of general deprivation. The questionnaire also included several questions about the five kinds of resources people may possess. To construct the index of total resources, these five kinds were condensed into a single monetary metric. This enabled Townsend to rank people according to their total resources and examine relationships with their levels of relative deprivation. If a point is identified in the resource ranking where deprivation increases disproportionately, then we have a positive test of the point of disproportion hypothesis. It is at that point that we should set the poverty line.

This means that in the cut-off measure, the poverty line is a variable dependent on the cultural and economic dynamics of a society. This aligns well with how Townsend conceptualizes resources and relative deprivation. Also, we can see why the cut-off measure is not only a formal representation but also comprises the set of procedures that enable researchers to determine its value. In this sense, within Townsend's theory, a representational feature of the poverty measure – the poverty line – is responsive to evidence gathered through its procedures. This kind of iteration, where conception, representation, and procedures are mutually reinforcing and adaptive, is another feature of good measures according to CRP.

Lastly, Townsend provides an explanation of the causes of poverty, detailing how resources are distributed in society and their impact on people's styles of living. This explanation

is structural in both an ontological and epistemic sense. It is a structural explanation in an ontological sense because it places the causes of poverty not in individuals but in the systems of resource distribution, with social classes being the primary mediators between these systems and individuals. The explanation is also structural in an epistemic sense because the ultimate causes and features of poverty are opaque, requiring scientific and systematic investigation for their elucidation. Therefore, beliefs not subjected to such scrutiny are unlikely to align with this structural understanding, though these beliefs are part of the objects that a theory of poverty should be able to explain. What about individualistic scientific theories about poverty? Well, Townsend would doubt that these theories are systematic.[1]

Inequality in access to resources is primarily explained by social classes, not merely occupations. This underscores the importance of looking beyond earned income to fully grasp wealth inequality, given that access to this kind of resource does not come through the wage system. Social institutions also play a crucial role in determining people's access to resources. An adequate explanation of poverty should also account for what Townsend calls "social minorities." These are people marginalized from the wage system and are disproportionately deprived, such as children, unpaid care workers, the retired elderly, and people with disabilities. The disparity in resource access leads to varying styles of life, yet a common national majority's style of living, or standard of living *simpliciter*, still emerges within a society. It is this standard that determines relative deprivation.

These features make the explanation of poverty acquire a Marxist outlook, which Townsend assumes. But he adds that it is a Marxist outlook with a distinct flavor: a flavor that originates in the effort to make possible poverty measurement in accordance with what he, Townsend, regarded as the main tenets (or epistemic values) of science. Specifically, these include the ability to test its own hypotheses; make its claims more precise and coherent; predict key features about poverty (such as its extent and dynamics); and track its relationship with other related phenomena, such as unemployment, discrimination, and the like.

[1] As I have mentioned above (note 6 in ***Chapter 5***), Townsend's explanation might be regarded as an instance of structural individualism, a strand of methodological individualism that is quite different from what he means by "individualistic" explanations.

This is related to my claim that the theory is of middle-range. After all, it provides an explanation of poverty that connects it with broad-range theories, that is, theories with more abstract concepts that aim to explain a broader set of phenomena. And second, by making poverty measurement possible, the theory connects poverty with the relevant empirical data.

Finally, let me close the argument by showing how the systematicity of the theory connects with Townsend's pursuit of the value-free ideal. The ideal has many meanings in the literature on values and science, but I will confine myself to two of them as put forward by Hugh Lacey (1999: 2-6).[2]

I start with value-freedom taken as "*impartiality*," according to which only epistemic values should guide important choices when building a measure and an explanation of poverty. Roughly, accepting impartiality implies denying that poverty is a thick concept (***Introduction, i***), as it goes against a researcher basing the choices she needs to make on contextual values. Doing so, states impartiality, would mean to help reproduce prejudiced views about people in poverty, and legitimize the biased worldviews of non-poor people about this phenomenon. These are subjective views about poverty which are widespread in society and influence research. The result is that researchers end up producing subjective conceptions, measures, and theories. In turn, these subjective measures and theories have animated and based models of social policies to tackle poverty that are mistaken and bound to fail (that is, they could not end poverty). To them, Townsend opposes his conception, measure, and explanation of poverty, all of which are considered objective because they satisfy epistemic values.[3] Only these could animate actual solutions or, as he puts it, be an "effective assault on poverty" (Townsend, 1979: 926).

Let us link this view about values in science with our discussion of systematicity. Hoyningen-Huene (2013) contends that a systematic scientific theory often stands in opposition to less critical, everyday views about the same phenomenon. We may take these less critical views as being typically based on contextual values. Thus, systematicity could have the potential to act as a buffer against the negative impact of contextual values on beliefs about a variety of objects,

[2] For good presentations and discussions of these two and other interpretations of value-freedom, see Anderson (2004: 3-7) and section 3 in Reiss and Sprenger (2020).

[3] However, consider the objection that Townsend's choice of poverty's basal space is value-laden (***Section 3.1.1.d***). To employ our current terminology, this objection argues that his conception lacks impartiality.

poverty being one of them. I think we can interpret Townsend's strategy as one of devising a systematic theory of poverty to avoid the negative impact of contextual values in his research. This could help him to avoid what would be wrong with the work of those researchers like Rowntree. Impartiality, therefore, serves as a safeguard against the centuries-old detrimental influence of moral and political values on poverty measurement (***Section 1.1***).

The second sense of value-freedom is called "*neutrality*" and is related to what Townsend called the "policy prescriptions" of the theory. This is the topic of the next section.

ii) From science to policy?

Neutrality is another sense of the value-free ideal. According to it, scientific assertions cannot or should not reinforce moral, political or any other contextual judgments (Lacey, 1999: 2-6). Does Townsend also embrace this kind of value-freedom? The answer is *no*. Remember, despite his critiques of the subsistence approach, Townsend was part of the research tradition established by Rowntree, which viewed surveys as tools for aiding in the establishment of various social reforms (***Introduction, ii***). The difference is that Townsend belonged to a more radical branch of this tradition known as "Fabianism." Its members argued for a democratic transition to socialism in Britain, where social reforms would gradually lead to differences in the quality of the society. Here, social science was seen as a necessary tool for implementing these reforms, for persuading the electorate of their appropriateness, and in this way ultimately leading Britain to socialism.

Townsend regarded "policy prescriptions" as intimately related with the other elements of his (and any) theory of poverty. He stated that:

> Theories of poverty need to be related to such different policies so that they can be better comprehended. At the very least we can appreciate that there are disagreements not merely about remedies or even explanations but also conceptions and measurement (or scale) of the problem. Each of the policies presupposes a different conception of the problem, different operationalization and measurement, and different explanation. Any statement of policy to reduce poverty contains an implicit if not explicit explanation of its cause. Any explanation of poverty contains an implicit prescription for policy. Any conceptualization of poverty contains an implicit explanation of the phenomenon. (Townsend, 1979: 64)

In this way, by asserting that poverty has structural causes, Townsend argues that only structural changes could eliminate it. This leads him to challenge the consensus about the capability of the British Welfare State and its coexistence with a market economy to eradicate poverty. Let us remember that for him, adopting a broader conception of resources allows for exploring other systems of distribution. Thus, going beyond income in the conception and measure of poverty would also mean that policies that affect only the systems distributing income will leave untouched other sources of poverty.

At the very end of PITUK (1979: 926), Townsend "sketches" six policies that, for him, his theory shows are necessary to eliminate poverty. Three of these are: implementing policies to significantly lower the wealth of the rich to a legally defined maximum; reducing top salaries and wages to a legally established maximum in proportion to the average; and innovating in public ownership and industrial democracy to create collaborative work environments, limit professional autonomy, and foster self-reliance and education (for the complete list, see this thesis' ***Appendix: List of six policies to end poverty***). Thus, the elimination of poverty would only be possible in a socialist economy arrived at through structural reforms in production and social relations.[4]

However, one of the main critiques to PITUK claims that there is no obvious link from social science to policy. In understanding this, it may be helpful to remember the three elements of a thick concept that I presented above (***Introduction, i***) and phrase them in accordance with impartiality and neutrality. Following my adapted version of Anderson's (2002) threefold definition, poverty is thick because:

(a) both its application and its measurement are guided by empirical facts;

(b) both its application and its measurement are also guided by contextual judgments *(rejection of impartiality);*

(c) it entails prescriptive judgments *(rejection of neutrality).*

What is Townsend's view about these elements? We saw that he accepts (a), given that poverty research should be sensitive to empirical evidence. He rejects (b), given he endorses

[4] It is curious to compare the comprehensive and radical interventions advocated by Townsend to the piecemeal and cautious proposals to fight poverty of Nobel Laureates in Economics, Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo (2012). I should note that in a review of their work, Pedro de Souza actually shows how Banerjee and Duflo preference for small-scale interventions at least in part stems from their favored research methodologies, namely, randomized control trials (Souza, 2021).

impartiality, which states that a scientist should strive to guide her activity only by epistemic values.[5] What about (c)? Well, by rejecting neutrality, Townsend accepts (c). After all, this is the only way to deploy the systematicity of his theory of poverty in favor of social change. And here lies the source of some of the main critiques of PITUK.

There are some researchers that deny (b) and (c), meaning they deny that identifying someone as in poverty implies a contextual judgment, and also deny that someone being in poverty implies that she lacks a thing she is entitled to, like a right to a given policy (McLachlan, 1983). This position is expressed by a perspicuous formulation by T. H. Marshall, who argued Townsend is "trying to straddle two horses, one a sociological horse concerned with the scientific analysis of social structure, the other a social policy horse, concerned to expose an evil and to seek a remedy" (Marshall, 1981: 82). On the other hand, there are researchers that accept through and through Anderson's definition of thick concepts. They argue that, yes, poverty involves contextual judgments (b), and this is precisely why poverty measurement can base social policies (c). Indeed, this was the basis of a famous critique by David Piachaud of PITUK (Piachaud, 1993 [1981]). For him, poverty concerns an unacceptable form of deprivation that constitutes a political problem. As such, its measure should reflect what society considers as those things that any person is entitled to have.[6]

Ultimately, the two objections are saying that it looks like Townsend wants to have the best of both worlds. Lest there be inconsistency, but *either* Townsend denies (b) and also (c); *or* he accepts (b) and also (c). I will not delve into these critiques or Townsend's potential responses in detail.[7] I believe it suffices to show how adding the policy prescription element to the equation

[5] See the discussion of the objection that Townsend's conception of poverty is animated by contextual values and two possible answers to it (***Section 3.1.1.d***).

[6] To recall our discussion of poverty's basal space (***Section 1.2.1***), it is worth mentioning three important conceptual interpretations of poverty that accept both (b) and (c). First, those who view the right poverty's basal space as equivalent to *basal equality* (what is called the "*equalisandum*") regard poverty measurement as determined by the right theory of justice and by what this theory implies on how the *equalisandum* should be distributed (***Section 1.2.1.a***). A second interpretation takes poverty as a matter of justice but denies any connection with egalitarianism (***Section 1.2.1.b***). This is the case of followers of sufficientarianism like Frankfurt (1987) and of those that vindicate the idea of a social minimum (White, 2021). Third, some like Wisor (2012) accept (b) and (c) but deny that poverty's basal space is necessarily a matter of justice (***Section 1.2.1.c***).

[7] A rigorous analysis of these objections and possible answers may require us to delve into those murky waters of metaethics and discuss things like the nature and relationship of evaluative and prescriptive judgments, as well as their relationship with factual judgments. As previously stated in the ***Introduction***, I have decided not to embark on this path and to leave these questions unanswered.

intensifies the tension between Townsend's quest for value freedom and his objectives for social reform.

These objections to Townsend's proposed prescriptions spurred the development of alternative versions of the relative deprivation approach that explicitly rejected value-freedom, thereby aiming to more directly influence public policy. Meanwhile, other researchers maintained Townsend's focus on epistemic values, and continued to be critical of a too-much reliance on subjective judgments when measuring poverty. As a result, Townsend's theory has inspired a diverse range of research programs, some of which are quite different. I will conclude the thesis with a brief commentary on this aspect of the theory, which I refer to as its "*fruitfulness*."[8]

iii) Fruitfulness

I have been referring to the dominant descriptive character of this thesis. This means that, so far, I was mainly concerned with providing an interpretation of Townsend's theory of poverty that strives to take into account the variety of its elements and to make explicit the connections among them. As previously noted, the "findings" of PITUK – including those concerning the theory's pivotal hypothesis, the point of disproportion – were at best tentative. Assessing these "findings" would be undoubtedly significant, but this thesis did not delve into the empirical (or lack of) soundness of Townsend's overall theory, or of the results of PITUK. Also, I have deliberately refrained from providing answers to the conceptual debates engaged by Townsend, such as the absolute versus relative understanding of poverty. Finally, I have just noted that Townsend's commitment to impartiality, alongside his objective to influence social policies through his theory, has been criticized for potential inconsistency. In fact, I do not pose a verdict on whether his pursuit of value-freedom ended up being consistent or not. Important and fascinating as an inquiry into these matters would be, it exceeds the scope of this thesis.

Nonetheless, in this thesis I do offer one evaluative assertion about Townsend's theory: I posit that it realizes the epistemic value of fruitfulness. More precisely, Townsend's theory, along

[8] Near the end of his life (Townsend, 2009), Townsend himself supplemented his conception of poverty as relative deprivation caused by a lack of resources with the framework provided by human rights (***Section 1.3.6***). His goal was to deploy the normative force of human rights in advocating for more transformative policies to combat global poverty. Can this be reconciled with his pursuit of value-freedom, or does it represent a radical departure where he abandoned impartiality entirely? These intriguing questions, unfortunately, must be reserved for further exploration.

with its associated approach to relative deprivation, have inspired diverse research programs and spurred the collection of new kinds of data about poverty. Regarding the latter point, following the publication of PITUK, surveys both in Britain and around the globe were motivated by the relative deprivation approach, each aiming to thoroughly explore the different dimensions of standards of living and resources, along with people's perceptions regarding these issues.[9]

The relative deprivation approach has also provided a basis for theorization and quantitative analysis of the concept of *social exclusion*. This concept gained popularity in Britain in the late 1990s when talking about "poverty" was quite unpopular. Nonetheless, social exclusion and poverty are closely related. Indeed, for some researchers, the conception of social exclusion is not fundamentally distinct from how Townsend conceptualizes poverty. They define social exclusion as encompassing those deprivations beyond the mere lack of income to include non-material dimensions of it. Hills *et al.* (2002) attempt to provide a more rigorous definition, stating that social exclusion encompasses deprivations (material and non-material) that are not solely caused by lack of resources, but also encompassing those stemming from discrimination and cultural differences.

Ultimately, John Hills (2002) argues that social exclusion is a concept useful for researchers for a strategical reason. Social exclusion plays an important role for those concerned with non-material aspects of poverty who wish to avoid the controversies of proposing a revised – and broader – conception it, such as Townsend's (***Section 3.1.1.d***). Ultimately, the relative deprivation approach could be regarded as a catalyst for more people acknowledging the significance of non-material forms of deprivation, despite some researchers choosing to entirely abandon the concept of poverty and embrace a new one.[10]

More generally, Townsend's approach influenced quantitative researchers in assessing poverty, deprivation, and social exclusion across different countries. Initially more prevalent in Europe, this research has recently expanded to regions such as Latin America and continents like

[9] In Britain, we had the *Breadline Britain Surveys* that are presented below and the *Poverty and Social Exclusion in Britain Survey* conducted in 1999 (Pantazis *et al.*, 2006). Other surveys are found in Nandy and Pomati (2015) and Beccaria *et al.* (2022). To be clear, some surveys mentioned here are guided by the consensual approach, which itself draws inspiration from Townsend's theory of relative deprivation.

[10] In that sense, they tackled the issue of the limitations of revising an ordinary concept without altering its subject matter by simply embracing a new concept, albeit one related to poverty. This is similar to Hull's (2007) strategy (see note 13 in ***Chapter 1***). Note 16 in ***Chapter 3*** addresses the issue of changing the subject in revisionary projects.

Africa, often with support from international organizations like the EU, UNESCO, and the United Nations.[11] These researchers mainly follow two significant research programs in poverty measurement and theory that have emerged as derivatives of Townsend's work: the "*scientific"* or *statistical approach* and the *consensual approach*. Both are rooted in the concept of poverty as relative deprivation and its link with resources but explore different aspects of the theory.

Akin to Townsend, the "scientific" or statistical approach to relative deprivation bases crucial measurement decisions on epistemic values such as explanatory power and testability.[12] To achieve this, researchers update PITUK's analysis using modern statistical techniques. In analyzing the connection between deprivation and resources, as well as in selecting indicators, their primary goal is to devise measures that rely less on contextual values. Proponents of the "scientific" approach argue that measures like those based on the capability approach have the undesirable characteristic of being "composed of combinations of variables that the authors think represent something 'bad,' although the exact nature of this 'bad' aspect is often ambiguous" (Gordon, 1995: 39, *apud* Gordon & Nájera, 2020: 1792). In other words, these measures are excessively influenced by contextual values, or so argue enthusiasts of the "scientific" approach.

As an illustration, a key statistical method in this approach represents poverty as a latent (unobservable) variable that correlates with observable indicators. The primary goal of this method is to offer a statistical model of this relationship. Statistical tests are employed to determine if the outcomes of a poverty measure are causes or effects of the latent variable, and whether they conform to the model's predictions. Accordingly, in designing the measure, researchers may select dimensions and indicators of poverty based on epistemic values, such as preserving the model's explanatory and predictive powers with the minimum necessary dimensions.

Researchers using these measures have explored the relationship between relative deprivation and levels of resources, aiming to test Townsend's point of disproportion hypothesis. Enthusiasts of Townsend's theory assert that "most [of these] empirical studies have reinforced the existence of such an inflection point [point of disproportion]" (Nájera & Gordon, 2023: 4). Others, such as Atkinson, adopt a more cautious perspective regarding these results, calling them "suggestive, but not definitive" (2019: 48). Atkinson notes that while trends and correlations

[11] For a list of such studies, see Gordon and Nájera (2020: 1792-1793) and Nájera and Gordon (2023).
[12] For an overview of this approach, see Gordon (2006) and Nájera and Gordon (2020). See also note 9 in ***Chapter 4***.

between relative deprivation and resources have been observed in some countries, the extent to which these findings confirm the point of disproportion hypothesis is ultimately a "matter of judgment" (Atkinson, 2019: 48).[13] I repeat, my goal is not to resolve debates of this nature, but rather to illustrate that the pursuit of hypotheses from Townsend's theory is ongoing.

Now, consider the consensual approach, initially developed by Joanna Mack and Stewart Lansley (1985). This approach follows Townsend's assertion that people's needs are socially and culturally relative. Therefore, poverty measures should encompass not only basic survival items but also include what is commonly endorsed or approved in a given society (Townsend, 1979: 31). Additionally, the consensual approach borrows from Townsend's theory the primary method for data collection: the use of surveys (***Section 4.3***).

However, unlike Townsend, the consensual approach rejects impartiality. Its main goal is to identify widely held views of British (or any other) society on what constitutes a *minimum acceptable standard of living*. Thus, as discussed earlier (***Sections 3.1.1.c*** and ***3.1.1.d***), it diverges from Townsend's stance by embracing a subjective approach. Put another way, it embraces the influence of contextual values and social beliefs in poverty measurement, viewing poverty as a concept that should be determined by societal views on the matter or, as Mack and Lansley writes, by what "*we* as a society have come to accept as necessities – the aspects of our way of life that are so important that when people are forced to go without they are *regarded* as deprived and *feel* deprived" (Mack & Lansley, 1985: 47; my emphasis).

Enthusiasts of this approach acknowledge Townsend's concerns regarding the risks of these subjective views reflecting the "the dominant interests in society, interests whose advantages are built at the expense of the poor" (Mack & Lansley, 1985: 47). However, they accept this risk in the pursuit of "a more *democratic representation* of interests" and less reliance on judgments by politicians and experts about poverty (Mack & Lansley, 1985: 47; my emphasis).

In that sense, the consensual approach offers a distinct solution to the problems of minimum and item selection (***Section 1.3.2***). By relying on public consultation, its goal is to address these issues in a less arbitrary manner than Rowntree and the adherents of the subsistence approach, as well as Townsend, who was accused of such arbitrariness in the selection of the

[13] Instances of these studies include Desai (1988), Fusco *et al.* (2011), Guio *et al.* (2012); Guio *et al.* (2016); and Ferragina *et al.* (2017).

indicators for his index of relative deprivation (***Section 4.2.2***). Furthermore, its proponents argue that, as it rejects both neutrality and impartiality, this approach is well-suited to inform social policies aimed at combating poverty because by:[14]

> establishing a minimum standard of living on the basis of what is to *most people unacceptable*, it establishes a *politically credible level*. The people who fall below this minimum level are in most people's opinion *entitled* to more. In a democratic society like Britain, this is an important criterion on which to base policies to help the poor. (Mack & Lansley, 1985: 48; my emphasis).

Thus, they aim to establish a minimum income capable of affording those things that society collectively believes everyone is entitled to have through policies such as public benefits. Moreover, its implementation would be facilitated by its basis on widely held public opinions. Various methodologies operationalizing this conception are currently employed in studies across several countries.[15] Importantly, some of these methodologies incorporate both subjective and non-subjective views about poverty and related notions. For instance, the *Minimum Income Standard* developed by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation not only sets a standard for public benefits but also for determining the Living Wage (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2008). Additionally, it provides guidance for individuals calculating their living expenses and for charitable organizations in assessing aid for individuals facing financial hardship.[16]

Both the "scientific" and consensual approaches are different ways of conceiving of and measuring poverty. We also referenced research centered on the related concept of social exclusion.[17] All three share a common origin: Townsend's approach and theory.

---

[14] The consensual approach may align well with the political philosophy strand focused on establishing a social minimum (White, 2021). See also ***Section 1.2.1.b*** and note 6 in this thesis' ***Conclusion***.

[15] For an extensive discussion of the consensual approach and its application in various fields, including budget and minimum standards, see Deeming (2020). Continuing the British tradition of survey-based social research, Mack and Lansley revisited their original *Breadline Britain Survey*, which was first conducted in 1983, with subsequent surveys carried out in 1990 and 2012. The findings from these updated studies are presented in Lansley and Mack (2015). Surveys based on the consensual approach have also been conducted in several countries within the Global North, as detailed in several chapters of Deeming (2020), and more recently in the Global South, including Benin (Nandy & Pomati, 2015), Uganda (Gordon *et al.*, 2019), and Argentina (Beccaria *et al.*, 2022).

[16] Another notable example measures that mix subjective and objective views is provided by Bradshaw and Finch (2003).

[17] I should note that I still am leaving aside another research program: the one that employs the relative deprivation approach to construct measures of poverty wherein the space of deprivation consists of healthy living standards (Deeming, 2012). See note 8 in ***Chapter 3***.

It looks like one could regard Townsend's theory as providing different angles from which poverty can be conceptualized; be measured; its data gathered and processed; its causes investigated; be related with other concepts; and debated in terms of policy implications. We could then see that the theory is not only systematic; but it could also be regarded as a collection of products, each with a use of their own. Perhaps, Townsend's commitment to systematicity was the catalyst for creating this versatile set of instruments for researching poverty. By striving for explanatory and predictive power, comprehensiveness, unification, and means to test hypotheses, Townsend's work has provided a toolkit that researchers with different, sometimes divergent aims have found useful.

***

This thesis opens with the predicament of Esmeralda,[18] raising questions such as what poverty's basal space is, how to settle the line that separates those in poverty from those who are not, and whether people like Anne could also be considered to be in poverty. It concludes without confirming or rejecting the correctness of the answers provided by Townsend's systematic theory to these and other questions.[19] However, I suggested that it was perhaps precisely this systematicity that furnished us with a rich set of tools, each with the potential to shed light on different parts of the manifold nature of poverty. Townsend's theory is not peculiar in this sense, as this might be a likely destiny of systematic theories about complex domains. Contrary to what might be their presumed purpose, these theories may be more appropriately viewed not as comprehensive solutions applicable to any scenario; but rather as a collection of useful yet limited tools for representing and intervening in the world.[20] Nevertheless, in one sense at least, Townsend's work does stand apart: In the moral and political weight it carries and in its grappling with the contentious and urgent issue of that form of human deprivation that we call "poverty."

---

[18] Indeed, by explicitly stating the cause of her deprivation ("I can't call the midwife *because I have no money to pay her*," de Jesus, 1997 [1961]; my emphasis), Esmeralda's predicament fits neatly into Townsend's conception of poverty: being deprived of customary living conditions or services due to a lack of resources (see the opening quote of this thesis' ***Introduction*** and note 3 also in the ***Introduction***).

[19] See ***Introduction, iv***.

[20] This aligns well with the account of scientific theories as *toolboxes*. For more on this perspective, see Cartwright *et al.* (1995: 138-140) and Alexandrova (2017: 25-40).

REFERENCES

a) Peter Townsend's authored or edited works cited in this thesis

- TOWNSEND, P. (1954). Measuring Poverty. **The British Journal of Sociology**, 5(2): 130-137.
- ——, (1958). A society for people. *In* Mackenzie (Ed.). ***Conviction***. London: MacGibbon & Kee, 93-120.
- ——, (1962). The Meaning of Poverty. **The British Journal of Sociology**, 13(3): 210- 227.
- ——, (1964). **The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales**. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- ——, (1979). **Poverty in the United Kingdom: A Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living**. Harmondsworth: Allen Lane.
- ——, (1985a). A Sociological Approach to the Measurement of Poverty: A Rejoinder to Professor Amartya Sen. **Oxford Economic Papers**, 37(4): 659-668.
- ——, (1985b). Review of Poor Britain (Mack and Lansley q.v.). **Poverty**, 61: 42-45.
- ——, (1987a). Deprivation. **Journal of Social Policy**, 16(2): 125-146.
- ——, (1987b). Conceptualizing poverty. *In* Ferge; Miller (Eds.). **The Dynamics of Deprivation, A Comparative Study in Europe, London and Vienna**. London: The Gower Press, pp. 31-44.
- ——, (1993). **The International Analysis of Poverty**. Hertfordshire: Harvester-Wheatsheaf.
- ——, (2006). Introduction. *In* United Nations Expert Group on Poverty Statistics (Rio Group). **Compendium of best practices in poverty measurement**. Rio de Janeiro: Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics, United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, pp. 15-33.
- ——, (Ed.) (2009). **Building Decent Societies: Rethinking the Role of Social Security in Development**. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- TOWNSEND, P.; GORDON, D.; PANTAZIS, C. (2006). The international measurement of 'absolute' and 71 'overall' poverty: applying the 1995 Copenhagen definitions to Britain. *In* Pantazis; Gordon; Levitas (Eds.). **Poverty and Social Exclusion in Britain**. Bristol: The Policy Press, pp. 71-88.
- UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL (n.d.). **PETER TOWNSEND – Complete list of publications 1948–2008**. Bristol: Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics and Political Science and also Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research. Retrieved December 15, 2023, from <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/poverty/downloads/background/petertownsendbibliography.pdf>.
- WALKER, A.; GORDON, D.; LEVITAS, R.; PHILLIMORE, P.; PHILLIPSON, C.; SALOMON, M. E.; YEATES, N. (Eds.) (2011). **The Peter Townsend reader**. Bristol: The Policy Press. [A compilation of passages from key works by Peter Townsend.]

b) Additional references

- ABEL-SMITH, B.; TOWNSEND, P. (1965). The Poor and the Poorest: A New Analysis of the Ministry of Labour's Family Expenditure Surveys of 1953-54 and 1960. **LSE Occasional Papers on Social Administration, 17.** London: G. Bell and Sons.
- ABEND, G. (2019). Thick Concepts and Sociological Research. **American Sociological Association**, 37(3): 209-233.
- ADCOCK, R. COLLIER, D. (2001). Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research. **American Political Science Review**, 95(3): 529-546.
- ALLEN, R. C. (2013). Poverty Lines in History, Theory, and Current International Practice. **Discussion Paper Series number 685**. Department of Economics of the University of Oxford.
- ——, (2017). Absolute Poverty: When Necessity Displaces Desire. **American Economic Review**, 107(12): 3690-3721.
- ALEXANDROVA, A. (2017). **A Philosophy for the Science of Well-Being**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ALEXANDROVA, A.; FABIAN, M. (2022). Democratising Measurement: or Why Thick Concepts Call for Coproduction. **European Journal for Philosophy of Science**, 12(7).
- ALKIRE, S.; SANTOS, M. E. (2014). Measuring Acute Poverty in the Developing World: Robustness and Scope of the Multidimensional Poverty Index. **World Development**, 59: 251-274.
- ALKIRE, S.; FOSTER, J. E.; SETH, S.; SANTOS, M. E.; ROCHE, J. M.; BALLON, P. (2015). **Multidimensional poverty measurement and analysis: A counting approach**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ALSTON, P. (2020). Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights: The parlous state of poverty eradication. **Human Rights Council Forty-fourth session**, 2 July. New York: UN General Assembly.
- ANDERSON, E. (2002). Situated Knowledge and the Interplay of Value Judgments and Evidence in Scientific Inquiry. *In* Gärdenfors; Woleński; Kijania-Placek (Orgs.). **In the Scope of Logic, Methodology and Philosophy of Science**. Chem: Springer, pp. 497-517.
- ——, (2004). Uses of value judgments in science: A general argument, with lessons from a case study of feminist research on divorce. **Hypatia**, 19(1): 1-24.
- ANGNER, E. (2015). Well- Being and economics. *In* Fletcher (Ed.). **The Routledge handbook of the philosophy of well-being**. London: Routledge: pp. 492-203.
- ARNESON, R. (2013). Egalitarianism. *In* Zalta (Ed.). **The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2013 ed.)**. Retrieved December 15, 2023, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/egalitarianism/>.
- ATKINSON, A. B. (1987). On the Measurement of Poverty. **Econometrica**, 55(4): 749-764.
- ——, (2019). **Measuring Poverty Around the World**. Princeton-NJ: Princeton University Press.
- ATKINSON. A. B.; CANTILLON, B.; MARLIER, E.; NOLAN, B. (2002). **Social Indicators: The EU and Social Inclusion**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- BABBIE, E. R. (2014). **The basics of social research. Sixth edition**. Belmont-CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

- BADIEI, S. (2022). Normative Economics and Its Enemies: Marx, Mises and Friedman. *In* Badiei & Grivaux (Eds.). **The Positive and the Normative in Economic Thought**. London: Routledge, pp. 63-84.
- BAI, Y.; HERFORTH, A.; MASTERS, W. A. (2022). Global variation in the cost of a nutrient-adequate diet by population group: an observational study. **Lancet Planet Health**, 6(1): e19-28.
- BANERJEE, A.; DUFLO, E. (2012). **Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty**. New York: PublicAffairs.
- BARBOSA, R.; SOUZA, P. H. G. F. de; SOARES, S. (2020). Distribuição de renda nos anos 2010: uma década perdida para desigualdade e pobreza. **Texto para discussão número 2610**. Brasília-DF: Ipea.
- BAUJARD, A.; GILARDONE, M. (2017). Sen is not a capability theorist. **Journal of Economic Methodology**, 24(1): 1-19.
- BRADSHAW, J.; MIDDLETON, S.; DAVIS, A.; OLDFIELD, N.; SMITH, N.; CUSWORTH, L.; WILLIAMS, J. (2008). **A minimum income standard for Britain: What people think**. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- BECCARIA, L.; FERNÁNDEZ, A. L.; NÁJERA, H. (2022). The use of the consensual approach for the improvement of existing multidimensional poverty data in Latin America: an illustration based on data from the City of Buenos Aires. **Journal of Poverty and Social Justice**, 31(1): 1-27.
- BECK, V.; HAHN, H.; LEPENIES, R. (Orgs.) (2020). **Dimensions of Poverty**: **Measurement, Epistemic Injustices, Activism**. Chem: Springer.
- BEVERIDGE, W. (1942). **Social Insurance and Allied Services – Presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty (The Beveridge Report)**. Retrieved December 15, 2023, from <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1942beveridge.html>.
- BOLTVINIK, J. (1991). La Medición de la Pobreza en America Latina. **Comercio Exterior**, 41(5): 423-428.
- ——, (2011). Peter Townsend y el rumbo de la investigación sobre pobreza en Gran Bretaña. *In* Malpica; Mendizábal; Lomelí (Coords.). **La necesaria reconfiguración de la política social de México**. México-DF: FKA, pp. 23-48.
- BOOTH, C. (1889). **Life and Labour of the People in London**. London: Macmillan and Co.
- BOUMANS, M. (2015). **Science Outside the Laboratory: Measurement in Field Science and Economics**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- BOWLEY, A. L.; BURNETT-HURST, A. R. (1915). **Livelihood and Poverty**. London: G. Bell.
- BOWLEY, A. L.; HOGG, M. H. (1925). **Has Poverty Diminished? A Sequel to "Livelihood and Poverty."** London: P. S. King and Son, Ltd.
- BRADBURN, N.; CARTWRIGHT, N.; FULLER, J. (2017). A Theory of Measurement. *In* McClimans (Org.). **Measurement in medicine**: **philosophical essays on assessment and evaluation**. Lanham-MA: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 73-88.
- BRADSHAW, J.; FINCH, N. (2003). Overlaps in Dimensions of Poverty. **Journal of Social Policy**, 32(4): 513-525.

- CALLAN, T.; NOLAN, B.; WHELAN, C. T.; HANNAN, D. F.; CREIGHTON, S. (1991). **Poverty, Income and Welfare in Ireland**. Dublin: The Economic and Social Research Institute.
- CALLAN, T.; NOLAN, B.; WHELAN, C. T. (1993). Resources, deprivation and the measurement of poverty. **Journal of Social Policy**, 22(2): 141-172.
- CAPPELEN, H. (2018). **Fixing Language: An Essay on Conceptual Engineering**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- CARTWRIGHT, N. (2020a) Why Trust Science? Reliability, Particularity and the Tangle of Science. **Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society**, 120(3): 237-252.
- ——, (2020b). Middle-range theory: Without it what could anyone do? **Theoria**, 35(3): 269-323.
- CARTWRIGHT, N.; SHOMAR, T.; SUÁRES, M. (1995). The toolbox of science: Tools for the building of models with a superconductivity example. **Poznan Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities**, 44, 137-149.
- CHAMBERLAIN, T. D. (2021). **The Capabilities Approach to Well-being: Characterizing Capabilities and Measuring Them**. Ph.D. Dissertation. San Diego-CA: University of California, San Diego.
- CHANG, H. (2004). **Inventing Temperature: Measurement and Scientific Progress**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- CHEN, S.; RAVALLION, M. (2013). More Relatively-Poor People in a Less Absolutely-Poor World. **Review of Income and Wealth**, 59(1): 1-28.
- CITRO, C.; MICHAEL, R. T. (Eds.). **Measuring Poverty: A New Approach**. Washington-DC: National Academy Press.
- COGAN, J. F. (1995). Appendix A: Dissent. *In* Citro; Michael (Eds.) **Measuring Poverty: A New Approach**. Washington-DC: National Academy Press, pp. 385-390.
- COHEN, G. A. (1989). On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice. **Ethics,** 99(4): 906-944.
- COMIN, F.; QIZILBASH; M.; ALKIRE, S. (Eds.) (2008). **The Capability Approach: Concepts, measures and applications**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- CORTINA, Adela. **Aporofobia, el rechazo al pobre: un desafío para la democracia**. Barcelona: Paidos, 2017.
- DARWISH, M. (2014). **Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?** Translated by Mohammad Shaheen. London: Hesperus Press Limited. (Original work published 1995.)
- DE JESUS, C. M. (2021). **Casa de Alvenaria, Volume 1: Osasco. (Prefaces by C. Evaristo & V. E. de Jesus).** São Paulo: Companhia das Letras. (Original work published 1961.)
- ——, (1997). **I'm going to a little house: The second diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus.** (M. S. Arrington Jr. & R. M. Levine, Trans.). Lincoln-NB: University of Nebraska Press. (Original work published 1961.)
- DEATON, A. (2015). **The Analysis of Household Surveys: A Microeconometric Approach to Development Policy**. Washington-DC: World Bank.
- DEATON A; CARTWRIGHT, N. (2018). Understanding and misunderstanding randomized controlled trials. **Social Science & Medicine**, 210: 2-21.
- DEEMING, C. (2012). Unfinished business: Peter Townsend's project for minimum income standards. **International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy**, 31(7/8): 505-516.

- ——, (Ed.) (2020). **Minimum Income Standards and Reference Budgets: International and Comparative Policy Perspectives**. Bristol: Policy Press.
- DEMEULENAERE, P. (Ed.). (2011). **Analytical Sociology and Social Mechanisms**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- DEPARTAMENTO INTERSINDICAL DE ESTATÍSTICA E ESTUDOS SOCIOECONÔMICOS (DIEESE). (2009, January). **Cesta básica de alimentos: Metodologia**. Retrieved February 1, 2024, from https://www.dieese.org.br/metodologia/metodologiaCestaBasica/?page=1
- DESAI, M.; SHAH, A. (1988). An Econometric Approach to the Measurement of Poverty. **Oxford Economic Papers**, 40(3): 505-22.
- DEVEAUX, M. (2021). **Poverty, Solidarity, and Poor-Led Social Movements**. New York: Oxford University Press.
- DIETERLEN, P. (2005). **Poverty A Philosophical Approach**. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- DJORDJEVIC, C.; HERFELD, C. (2021). Thick Concepts in Economics: The Case of Becker and Murphy's Theory of Rational Addiction. **Philosophy of the Social Sciences**, 51(4): 371-399.
- DUPRÉ, J. (2007). Fact and Value. *In* Kincaid; Dupre; Wylie (Eds.). **Value-Free Science? Ideals and Illusions**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 27-41.
- FALCÃO, T.; DA COSTA, P. V. (2014). A linha de extrema pobreza e o público-alvo do Plano Brasil Sem Miséria. Campello; Falcão; da Costa (Orgs.). **O Brasil Sem Miséria**. Brasília-DF: Ministério do Desenvolvimento Social e Combate à Fome, pp. 67-96.
- FAO (2001). **Human energy requirements: Report of a Joint FAO/WHO/UNU Expert Consultation. Food and Nutrition Technical Report Series**. Rome: FAO.
- FAO; IFAD; WFP. (2014). **The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2014. Strengthening the enabling environment for food security and nutrition**. Rome: FAO.
- FERRAGINA, E.; TOMLINSON, M.; WALKER, R. (2017). Poverty and Participation in Twenty-First Century Multicultural Britain. **Social Policy & Society**, 16(4): 535-559.
- FERREIRA, F. H. G. (2016). A global count of the extreme poor in 2012: data issues, methodology and initial results. **Journal of Economic Inequality**, 14: 141-172.
- FISHER, G. M. (1992). The Development and History of the Poverty Thresholds. **Social Security Bulletin**, 55(4): 3-14.
- FISK, M. (1982). The Concept of Primacy in Historical Explanation. **Analyse & Kritik**, 4(2): 182-196.
- FOSTER, J. E.; GREER, J.; THORBECKE, E. (1984). A class of decomposable poverty measures. **Econometrica**, 52(3): 761-766.
- FRAGOSO, K. P.; LEMAY, M.-P. (2024). Philosophy, Poverty, and Inequality: Normative and Applied Reflections. *In* Schweiger; Sedmak (Orgs.). **The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy and Poverty**. London: Routledge.
- FRANKFURT, H. (1987). Equality as a Moral Ideal. **Ethics**, 98(1): 21-42.
- FUSCO, A.; GUIO, A.-C.; MARLIER, E. (2011). Income poverty and material deprivation in European countries. **LISER Working Paper Series**, No. 2011–04. Luxembourg: LISER.
- GAISBAUER, H. P.; SCHWEIGER, G.; SEDMAK, C. (Eds.). **Ethical Issues in Poverty Alleviation**. Cham: Springer.

- GAZELEY, I.; RUFRANCOS, H. G.; NEWELL, A.; REYNOLDS, K.; SEARLE, R. (2017). The Poor and the Poorest, 50 years on: Evidence from British Household Expenditure Surveys of the 1950s and 1960s. **Journal of the Royal Statistical Society Series A: Statistics in Society**, 180(2): 455-474.
- GILLIE, A. (1996). The origin of the poverty line. **Economic History Review**, 49(4): 715-730.
- GLENNERSTER, H. (2011). Peter Brereton Townsend 1928–2009. *In* Johnston (Ed.). **Proceedings of the British Academy**, 172 (Biographical Memoirs of Fellows, X): 303-321.
- GOLDTHORPE, J. H. (2009). Analysing Social Inequality: A Critique of Two Recent Contributions from Economics and Epidemiology. **European Sociological Review**, 26(6): 731-744.
- ——, (2015). **Sociology as a Population Science**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- GOODIN, R. (1988). **Reasons for Welfare: The Political Theory of the Welfare State**. Princeton-NJ: Princeton University Press.
- GORDON, D. (2006). The concept and measurement of poverty. *In* Pantazis; Gordon; Levitas (Eds.). **Poverty and Social Exclusion in Britain**. Bristol: The Policy Press, pp. 29-70.
- GORDON, D; ADELMAN, L; ASHWORTH, K; BRADSHAW, J.; LEVITAS, R.; MIDDLETON, S.; PANTAZIS, C., PATSIOS, D.; PAYNE, S.; TOWNSEND, P; WILLIAMS, J. (2000). **Poverty and Social Exclusion in Britain**. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- GORDON, D.; EROGLU-HAWKSWORTH, S.; FAHMY, E., FIFITA, V. K. K.; NANDY, S., OLOYA, A. (2019). **Multidimensional Child Poverty and Deprivation in Uganda: The Views of the Public**. Uganda: UNICEF.
- GOUGH, I. (1981). Review Article: *Poverty in the United Kingdom*. **International Journal of Health Services**, 11(2): 315-328.
- GREENE, C. (2020). Nomadic Concepts, Variable Choice, and the Social Sciences. **Philosophy of the Social Sciences**, 50(1): 3-22.
- GRIFFITHS, P. E. (1997). **What Emotions Really Are**. London: The University of Chicago Press.
- GRUSKY, D.B., WEEDEN, K. A. (2013). Measuring Poverty: The Case for a Sociological Approach. *In* Kakwani; Silber (Orgs.). **The Many Dimensions of Poverty**. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 20-35.
- GUIO, A.-C.; GORDON, D.; MARLIER, E. (2012). Measuring material deprivation in the EU: Indicators for the whole population and child-specific indicators. **Eurostat methodologies and working papers**. Luxemburg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- GUIO, A.-C.; MARLIER, E.; GORDON, D.; FAHMY, E.; NANDY, S.; POMATI, M. (2016). Improving the measurement of material deprivation at the European Union level. **Journal of European Social Policy**, 26(3): 219-333.
- HANSON, K. (2008). Mollie Orshansky's Strategy to Poverty Measurement as a Relationship between Household Food Expenditures and Economy Food Plan. **Review of Agricultural Economics**, 30(3): 572-580.

- HASENBALG, C. (2003). Pobreza no Brasil no final do século XX. *In* Hasenbalg; Valle Silva (Orgs.). **Origens e destinos: desigualdades sociais ao longo da vida**. Rio de Janeiro: TopBooks, pp. 457-460.
- HICKS, N.; STREETEN, P. (1979). Indicators of development: The search for a basic needs yardstick. **World Development**, 7(6): 567-580.
- HILLS, J. (2002). Does a Focus on 'Social Exclusion' Change the Policy Response? *In* Hills; Le Grand; Piachaud (Eds.). **Understanding Social Exclusion**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 226-243.
- HILLS, J.; LE GRAND, J.; PIACHAUD, D. (Eds.) (2002). **Understanding Social Exclusion**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- HOBSBAWN, E. J. (1968). Poverty. *In* Sills (Ed.). **International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol. 12**. New York: The Macmillan Company and The Free Press, pp. 398-404.
- HOYNINGEN-HUENE, P. (2013). **Systematicity: The nature of science**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- HULL, R. (2007). **Deprivation and Freedom: A Philosophical Enquiry**. London: Routledge.
- IBARRA, G. L.; PAFFHAUSEN, A. L.; DUQUE, D. (2021). Estimating a Poverty Line for Brazil based on the 2017/18 Household Budget Survey. **Policy Research Working Paper 9878**. Washington-DC: World Bank.
- JANNUZZI, P. de M. (2017). **Indicadores Sociais no Brasil: conceitos, fontes de dados e aplicações. 6. ed**. Campinas: Alínea.
- JESUS, C. M. de (1997). **I'm Going to Have a Little House: The Second Diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus**. Translated by Arrington Jr., M. S., & Levine, R. M. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. (Original work published 1961.)
- KAPLAN, A. (1998). **The Conduct of Inquiry: Methodology for Behavioral Science**. London: Transaction Publishers. (Original work published 1964.)
- KINCAID, H.; DUPRÉ, J.; WYLIE, A. (Eds.) (2007). **Value-Free Science? Ideals and Illusions**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- KIRCHIN, S. (Ed.) (2013). **Thick Concepts**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- LACEY, H. (1999). **Is Science Value-Free? Values and Scientific Understanding**. London: Routledge.
- LADERCHI, C. R. (2000). The monetary approach to poverty: a survey of concepts and methods. **QEH Working Paper Series, Number 58**. Oxford: Oxford University.
- LADERCHI C. R.; SAITH, R.; STEWART, F. (2003). Does it Matter that we do not Agree on the Definition of Poverty? A Comparison of Four Approaches. **Oxford Development Studies**, 31(3): 243-274.
- LAND, K. C.; MICHALOS, A. C.; SIRGY, J. (2012). Prologue: The Development and Evolution of Research on Social Indicators and Quality of Life (QOL). *In* Land; Michalos; Sirgy (Eds.). **Handbook of Social Indicators and Quality of Life Research**. Chem: Springer, pp. 1-22.
- LANSLEY, S.; MACK, J. (2015). **Breadline Britain: The Rise of Mass Poverty**. London: Bloomsbury.

- LEITE, M. (2021). **Individualismo Metodológico Contemporâneo: Defesa e Crítica**. Master's Thesis. Belo Horizonte: Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais.
- LEITER, B. (2015). Why Marxism Still Does Not Need Normative Theory. **Analyse & Kritik**, 37(1-2): 23-50.
- LISTER, R. (1990). **The Exclusive Society: Citizenship and the Poor**. London: Child Poverty Action Group.
- ——, (2021). **Poverty (2nd edition)**. Cambridge: Polity.
- LITTLE, D. (1991). **Varieties of social explanation: an introduction to the philosophy of social science**. Boulder: Westview Press.
- LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE (n.d.). **LSE Pioneers in social policy: Peter Townsend**. Retrieved February 1, 2024, from <https://www.lse.ac.uk/lse-health/about/peter-townsend>.
- LONGINO, H. (1990). **Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry**. Princeton-NJ: Princeton University Press.
- MACK, J.; LANSLEY, S. (1985). **Poor Britain**. London: Allen & Unwin.
- MAIA. S. (2021). Resenha crítica de CAPPELEN, Herman. Fixing Language: An Essay on Conceptual Engineering. **Principia: An International Journal of Epistemology**, 25 (3): 565-575.
- MARI, L.; WILSON, M.; MAUL, A. (2021). **Measurement Across the Sciences: Developing a Shared Concept System for Measurement**. Cham: Springer.
- MARSHALL, A. (1890). **Principles of Economics**. London: Macmillan and Co.
- MARSHALL, T. H. (1981). Poverty or Deprivation? **Journal of Social Policy**, 10(1): 81-87.
- MCLACHLAN, H. V. (1983). Townsend and the concept of 'Poverty'. **Social Policy and Administration**, 17(2): 97-105.
- MEDEIROS, M. (2012). **Medidas de Desigualdade e Pobreza**. Brasília: Editora UnB.
- ——, (2023). **Os ricos e os pobres: O Brasil e a Desigualdade**. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.
- MERRIAM-WEBSTER (2023a). Lack. *In* **Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary**. Retrieved December 15, 2023, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lack>.
- ——, (2023b). Deprivation. *In* **Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary**. Retrieved December 15, 2023, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/deprivation>.
- MILLER, D. (2007). **National responsibility and global justice.** New York: Oxford University Press.
- MISTURELLI, F.; HEFFERNAN, C. (2010). The concept of poverty: a synchronic perspective. **Progress in Development Studies**, 10(1): 35-58.
- NÁJERA, H.; GORDON, D. (2020). The Importance of Reliability and Construct Validity in Multidimensional Poverty Measurement: An Illustration Using the Multidimensional Poverty Index for Latin America (MPI-LA). **The Journal of Development Studies**, 56(9): 1763-1783.
- ——, (2023). A Monte Carlo Study of Some Empirical Methods to Find the Optimal Poverty Line in Multidimensional Poverty Measurement. **Social Indicators Research**, 167: 391-419.
- NANDY, S.; POMATI, M. (2015). Applying the consensual method of estimating poverty in a low income African setting. **Social Indicators Research**, 124(3), 693-726.

- NUSSBAUM, M C. (2000). **Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ——, (2003). Capabilities as Fundamental Entitlements: Sen and Social Justice. **Feminist Economics**, 9(2-3): 33-59.
- OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS. (n.d.). Family Expenditure Survey, 1961-2001. **JISC Archives Hub**. Retrieved December 15, 2023, from <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/412e6ebd-8de7-3e6e-b060-34d35cffaf15>.
- ORSHANSKY, M. (1969). How poverty is measured. **Monthly Labor Review**, 92(2): 37-41.
- PANTAZIS, C.; GORDON, D.; LEVITAS, R. (2006). **Poverty and social exclusion in Britain: The millennium survey**. Bristol: Policy Press.
- PATRIANI, L. (2022, August 10). In Brazil's Amazon, traditional midwives push for greater recognition. **Mongabay**. Retrieved December 15, 2023, from <https://news.mongabay.com/2022/08/in-brazils-amazon-traditional-midwives-push-for-greater-recognition/>.
- PIACHAUD, D. (1987). Problems in the Definition and Measurement of Poverty. **Journal of Social Policy**, 16(2): 147-164.
- ——, (1993) Part 1: David Piachaud – Poverty in the United Kingdom. Originally published as "Peter Townsend and the Holy Grail." New Society, 57: 419-421. *In* Townsend, P., **The International Analysis of Poverty**. Hertfordshire: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, pp. 113-120. (Original work published 1981.)
- PIKETTY, T. (2014). **Capital in the Twenty-First Century**. Cambridge-MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- PINZANI, A.; REGO, W. L. (2019). **Money, Autonomy and Citizenship: The Experience of the Brazilian Bolsa Família**. Chem: Springer.
- POGGE, T. (2008). **World poverty and human rights: Cosmopolitan responsibilities and reforms.** Cambridge: Polity Press.
- PUTNAM, H. (2002). **The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays**. Cambridge-MA: Harvard University Press.
- RAVALLION, M. (2016). **The Economics of Poverty: History, Measurement, and Policy**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- RAVALLION, M.; DATT, G.; VAN DE Walle, D. (1991). Quantifying absolute poverty in the developing world. **Review of Income and Wealth**, 37(4): 345-361.
- RAWLS, J. (1971). **A Theory of Justice, Original Edition.** Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- REDDY, S.; POGGE, T. (2010). How not to count the poor. *In* Anand; Segal; Stiglitz (Eds.). **Debates on the measurement of global poverty**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 42-85.
- REISS, J. (2008). **Error in Economics Towards a More Evidence–Based Methodology**. London: Routledge.
- ——, (2021). Measurement and Value Judgments. *In:* Heilmann; Reiss (Eds.). **The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Economics**. London: Routledge, pp. 223-233.
- REISS, J.; SPRENGER, J. (2020). Scientific Objectivity. *In* Zalta (Ed.). **The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2020 ed.)**. Retrieved December 15, 2023, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/scientific-objectivity/>.

- RENWICK, C. (2023). The Family Life of Peter and Ruth Townsend: Social Science and Methods in 1950s and Early 1960s Britain. **Twentieth Century British History**: 34(4): 634-656.
- RINGEN, R. (1988). Direct and Indirect Measures of Poverty. **Journal of Social Policy**, 17(3): 351-365.
- ROBEYNS, I.; BYSKOV, M. F. (2020). The Capability Approach. *In* Zalta (Ed.). **The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2023 Edition)**. Retrieved December 15, 2023, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2023/entries/capability-approach/>.
- ROCHA, S. (2006). **Pobreza no Brasil: afinal do que se trata?** Rio de Janeiro: FGV Editora.
- ROWNTREE, B. S. (1901). **Poverty: A Study of Town Life**. London: Macmillan and Co.
- ——, (1937). **The Human Needs of Labour**. London: Longmans Green.
- ROWNTREE, B. S.; LAVERS, G. R. (1951). Poverty and the Welfare State: A Third Social Survey of York. New York: Longmans, Green and Co.
- ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF INCOMES AND WEALTH. (1974-1979). **Royal Commission on the Distribution of Incomes and Wealth (Diamond Commission): Records**. Kew: The National Archives. Retrieved December 15, 2023, from <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C3023#>.
- RUNCIMAN, W. G. (1966). **Relative Deprivation and Social Justice: A Study of Attitudes to Social Inequality in Twentieth-century England**. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- SANTOS, M. E. (2014). Measuring Multidimensional Poverty in Latin America: Previous Experience and the Way Forward. **OPHI Working Paper Number 66**.
- SANTOS, M. E.; VILLATORO, P. (2020). Response: The Importance of Reliability in the Multidimensional Poverty Index for Latin America (MPI-LA). **The Journal of Development Studies**, 56(9): 1784-1789.
- SCHWEIGER, G. (2020a). Absolute Poverty in European Welfare States. *In:* Beck, V., Hahn, H., Lepenies, R. (Eds.). **Dimensions of Poverty. Philosophy and Poverty, vol 2**. Cham: Springer, pp. 163-176.
- ——, (Ed.). (2020b). **Poverty, Inequality and the Critical Theory of Recognition**. Chem: Springer.
- SCHWEIGER, G.; SEDMAK, C. (Orgs.) (2024). **The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy and Poverty**. London: Routledge.
- SEN, A. K. (1967). The Nature and Classes of Prescriptive Judgements. **The Philosophical Quarterly (1950-)**, 17(66): 46-62.
- ——, (1976). Poverty: An Ordinal Approach to Measurement. **Econometrica**, 44(2), 219-31.
- ——, (1980a). Equality of What? *In* McMurrin (Ed.). **Tanner Lectures on Human Values**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 195-220.
- ——, (1980b). Description as Choice. **Oxford Economic Papers**, 32(3): 353-369.
- ——, (1981). **Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation.** Oxford: Oxford-Clarendon Press.
- ——, (1982). **Choice, Welfare and Measurement**. Cambridge-MA: Harvard University Press.
- ——, (1983). Poor, Relatively Speaking. **Oxford Economic Papers**, 35(2): 153-69.
- ——, (1985). A Sociological Approach to the Measurement of Poverty: A Reply to Professor Peter Townsend. **Oxford Economic Papers**, 37(4): 669-676.

- ——, (1987). **The Standard of Living**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ——, (1992). **Inequality Reexamined**. Cambridge-MA: Harvard University Press.
- ——, (1999). **Development as Freedom**. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- ——, (2017). **Collective Choice and Social Welfare: An Expanded Edition**. Cambridge-MA: Harvard University Press.
- SEN, A. K.; FOSTER, J. (1997) **On Economic Inequality: Enlarged Edition**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- SHAFFER, P. (2013). Ten Years of "Q-Squared": Implications for Understanding and Explaining Poverty. **World Development**, 45: 269-285.
- SHAW, B. (1988). Poverty: Absolute or Relative? **Journal of Applied Philosophy**, 5(1): 27-36.
- SHORT, K. (2015). **The Supplemental Poverty Measure: 2014**. Washington-DC: US Census Bureau.
- SIMMEL, S.; JACOBSON, C. (Trans.) (1965). The poor. **Social Problems**, 13(2): 118-140. (Original work published 1907.)
- SINFIELD, A.; WALKER, A.; WALKER, C. (2011). The legacy of Peter Townsend. In Walker; Sinfield; Walker (Eds.). **Fighting Poverty, Inequality and Injustice: A manifesto inspired by Peter Townsend**. Bristol: The Policy Press, pp. 1-27.
- SLACK, P. (1995). **The English Poor Law, 1531-1782**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- SMITH, A. (1981) **An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, edited by Campbell and Skinner (reprint)**. Indianapolis: Liberty Press. (Original work published 1776.)
- SOARES, S. S. D. (2009). Metodologias para estabelecer a linha de pobreza: objetivas, subjetivas, relativas, multidimensionais. **Texto para Discussão, número 1381**. Brasília-DF: Ipea.
- SOUZA, P. H. G. F. de (2021, December 1). De centavo em centavo. **Quatro cinco um**. Retrieved February 1, 2024, from <https://www.quatrocincoum.com.br/br/resenhas/economia/de-centavo-em-centavo>.
- ——, (2022). A evolução da pobreza monetária no Brasil no século XXI. **Políticas Sociais: acompanhamento e análise**, 29. Brasília-DF: Ipea.
- SPICKER, P. (1990). Charles Booth: the examination of poverty. **Social Policy & Administration**, 24(1): 21-38.
- ——, (2006). Definitions of poverty: twelve clusters of meaning. *In* Spicker; Leguizamón; Gordon (Eds.). **Poverty: An international glossary, Second Edition**. London: Zed Books Ltd, pp. 229-243.
- ——, (2007). **The idea of poverty**. Bristol: Policy Press.
- STEVENS, S. S. (1946). On the theory of scales of measurement. **Science**, 103(2684): 677-680.
- STIGLER, G. (1945). The Cost of Subsistence. **Journal of Farm Economics**, 27(2): 303-14.
- STOUFFER, S. A.; SUCHMAN, E. A.; DEVINNEY, L. C.; STARR, S. A.; WILLIAMS, R. M. (1949). **The American Soldier: Adjustment to Army Life. Vol. 1**. Princeton-NJ: Princeton University Press.

- STREETEN, P.; Burki, J. S.; Haq, M. U.; Hicks, N.; Stewart, F. (1981). **First things first: Meeting basic human needs in developing countries**. New York: Oxford University Press.
- TAL, E. (2015). Measurement in Science. *In* Zalta (Ed.). **The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2020 Edition)**. Retrieved December 15, 2023, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/measurement-science/>.
- THUROW, L. C. (1969). **Poverty and Discrimination**. Washington-DC: Brookings Institution.
- UNITED NATIONS. (n.d.). **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**. Retrieved December 15, 2023, from <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.
- U.S. CENSUS BUREAU (2014). **The history of the official poverty measure**. Retrieved December 15, 2023, from <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2014/demo/poverty_measure-history.html>.
- VÄYRYNEN, P. (2013). **The Lewd, the Rude and the Nasty: A Study of Thick Concepts in Ethics**. New York: Oxford University Press.
- VEIT-WILSON, J. (1986). Paradigms of poverty: a rehabilitation of B.S. Rowntree. **Journal of Social Policy**, 15(1): 69-99.
- WALKER, R. (1987) Consensual Approaches to the Definition of Poverty: Towards an Alternative Methodology. **Journal of Social Policy**, 16(2): 213-226.
- ——, (2014). **The Shame of Poverty**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- WEBER, M. (1946). Science as Vocation. *In* Gerth; Mills (Eds.; Trans.). **Max Weber: Essays in Sociology**. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 129-156. (Original work published 1917.)
- WEDDERBURN, D. (1981). Review Symposium on P. Townsend, *Poverty in the United Kingdom: A Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living*. **The British Journal of Sociology**, 32(2): 274-278.
- WHITE, S. (2021). Social Minimum. *In* Zalta (Ed.). **The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2021 Edition)**. Retrieved December 15, 2023, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/social-minimum/>.
- WILLIAMS, B. (1985). **Ethics and the limits of philosophy**. London: Routledge.
- ——, (1995). **Making sense of humanity and other philosophical papers, 1982-1993**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- WISOR, S. (2012). **Measuring Global Poverty: Toward a Pro-Poor Approach**. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- WOLFF, J. (2015). Social Equality, Relative Poverty and Marginalised Groups. *In* Hull (Ed.). **The Equal Society: Essays in Theory and Practice**. London: Lexington Books.
- WOLFF, J.; DE-SHALIT, A. (2007) **Disadvantage**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- WOLFF, J.; LAMB, E.; ZUR-SZPIRO, E. (2015). **A Philosophical Review of Poverty**. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- WOODWARD, J.; ROSS, L. (2021). Scientific Explanation. *In* Zalta (Ed.). **The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2021 Edition)**. Retrieved December 15, 2023, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/scientific-explanation/>.

APPENDIX

List of PITUK's sixty indicators of relative deprivation

Source: It is found in "Appendix Thirteen – Multiple Deprivation" (Townsend, 1979: 1173-1176).

Dietary

1. At least one day without cooked meal in last two weeks
2. No fresh meat most days of week
3. School child does not have school meals
4. Has not had cooked breakfast most days of the week
5. Household does not have a Sunday joint three weeks in four
6. Fewer than three pints of milk per person per week

Clothing

7. Inadequate footwear for both wet and fine weather
8. Income unit buys second-hand clothes often or sometimes
9. Income unit misses clothing club payments often or sometimes
10. (Married women) No new winter coat in last three years

Fuel and light

11. No electricity or light only (not power)
12. Short of fuel sometimes or often
13. No central heating
14. No rooms heated (or only one)

Household facilities

15. No TV
16. No refrigerator
17. No telephone
18. No record player
19. No radio
20. No washing machine
21. No vacuum cleaner
22. No carpet
23. No armchair

Housing conditions and amenities

24. No sole use of four amenities (indoor WC, sink or washbasin, bath or shower, and cooker)
25. Structural defects
26. Structural defects believed dangerous to health
27. Overcrowded (in terms of number of bedrooms)

Conditions at work (severity, security, amenities and welfare benefits)

28. Works mainly or entirely outdoors Stands or walks at work all the time
29. Working fifty or more hours last week
30. At work before 8 a.m. or working at night
31. Poor outdoor amenities of work (See page 438)
32. Poor indoor amenities of work (page 438)
33. Unemployed for two weeks or more during previous twelve months Subject to one week's entitlement to notice or less
34. No wages or salary during sickness
35. Paid holidays of two weeks or less
36. No meals paid or subsidized by employer
37. No entitlement to occupational pension

Health

40. Health poor or fair
41. Sick from work five or more weeks last year
42. Ill in bed fourteen days or more last year
43. Has disability condition
44. Has some or severe disability

Educational

45. Fewer than ten years' education

Environmental

No garden or yard, or shared
If garden, too small to sit in
Air dirty or foul smelling
No safe place for child (1-4) to play
50. No safe place for child (5-10) to play

Family

51. Difficulties indoors for child to play
52. Child not had friend in to play in last four weeks
53. Child not had party last birthday
54. Household spent less than additional £10 last Christmas

Recreational

55. No afternoons or evenings out in last two weeks
56. No holiday in last twelve months away from home

Social

57. No emergency help available, e.g. illness
58. No one coming to meal or snack in last four weeks
59. Not been out to meal or snack with relatives or friends in last four weeks
60. Moved house at least twice in last two years

List of Townsend's six policies to end poverty

Source: It is found in Townsend (1979: 926).

1. ***Abolition of excessive wealth.*** The wealth of the rich must be substantially reduced by different policies and a statutory definition of maximum permissible wealth in relation to the mean agreed.
2. ***Abolition of excessive income.*** Top salaries or wages must be substantially reduced in relation to the mean and a statutory definition of maximum permissible earnings (and income) agreed.
3. ***Introduction of an equitable income structure and some breaking down of the distinction between earners and dependants.*** At the logical extreme this might involve the withdrawal of personal income taxation and of the social security benefits scheme, and the payment of tax-free incomes according to a publicly agreed and controlled schedule by occupational category and skill, but also by need or dependency – which would cover a relatively narrow span of variability; together with a substantial increase in corporation or payroll taxes. A less radical and therefore less effective solution would be the adoption of a more comprehensive income policy than the policies primarily of wage restraint which have operated since the early 1960s, together with a more coordinated social security benefit scheme with higher relative levels of benefit.
4. ***Abolition of unemployment.*** For all over the age of compulsory education a legally enforceable right to work is needed, with a corresponding obligation on the part of employers, the government and especially local authorities, to provide alternative types of employment. This right would apply at different, including severe, levels of disablement, and would apply also to the elderly.
5. ***Reorganization of employment and professional practice.*** There must be further innovations in public ownership, industrial democracy and collaborative instead of hierarchical work structures; restraint on the growth of power under the guise of professional and managerial autonomy, and encouragement of self-dependence and a high level of universal education.
6. ***Reorganization of community service.*** There must be a corresponding growth of rights and hence responsibilities for members of local communities, with abolition of the distinction between owner-occupiers and tenants, and social-service support for the individual and family at home rather than in institutions.

PITUK: Full Text Access

Townsend, Peter. *Poverty in the United Kingdom: A Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living*. The complete work, spanning 1,216 pages, can be downloaded from the following resource:

Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK. "Free Resources Books: Poverty in the United Kingdom." Retrieved November 15, 2023, from <https://www.poverty.ac.uk/free-resources-books/poverty-united-kingdom>.