

The idea of human flourishing

The Vision 2030 of Tecnológico de Monterrey continues and evolves the foundational lines of the Institute. It is synthesized in the motto *Leadership, innovation and entrepreneurship for human flourishing*. The idea of human flourishing, which has always been present at Tecnológico de Monterrey alongside the professional, scientific and technical components, now takes on, more centrally, the character of a great common goal. Key orientations of the Tecnológico's philosophy, such as the person at the center, the sustainable development of communities, integral wellbeing, entrepreneurial, responsible and ethical leadership, citizenship and inclusion, among others, are harmoniously articulated in a vision that seeks the fulfillment of people in their natural and social environments. This text seeks to contribute to the deepening and understanding of this vision, in a proactive and non-exclusive manner.

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I. Introduction: why Human Flourishing

By including the concept of Human Flourishing in its vision for 2030, Tecnológico de Monterrey has made explicit its commitment to the betterment of society and the people who form it. Through the idea of Human Flourishing¹, the Tec has outlined the areas and scope of its contribution to the well-being of its own audiences and of society in general. Global society, as well as Mexican society, has changed since the founding of the Institute and therefore, taking charge of the present, Tec promotes Human Flourishing as the purpose of all its activities, while at the same time updating its differentiating features and founding principles. That is why it is necessary to enrich and socialize this goal, how the commitment to it is understood and what are the conceptual guidelines for its educational-formative realization.

The proposal of Human Flourishing allows for the improvement of the educational and formative model of Tecnológico de Monterrey, in the sense of a more complete realization of the potential of individuals and of the goals and ideals that animate society. However, it should be noted that this idea is closely related to other terms with which it is sometimes identified, so it is easy to fall into ambiguities. It is a notion strongly related to concepts such as happiness, virtue, capabilities, meaning or purpose of life, transcendence, health, development, justice, well-being and sustainability; all these concepts are meaningful, so the intention of this document is to enrich the institutional discourse with all these nuances, rather than to exclude or restrict opinions.

¹ Preliminarily described in the Vision to 2030 as "the conscious development of people seeking their physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual and social fulfillment, which positively impact their environment and society."



II. Origin, evolution, and actuality of Human Flourishing

It can be said that all human societies have an idea of flourishing, although with different degrees of awareness and intentionality, since every society generates an idea of the human being and the necessary means to realize this ideal. The Greeks referred to this multiform cultural task with the term *paideia*, from which the term pedagogy was derived. But *paideia* was not only manifested in the school, it encompassed the arts, ethics, politics and forms of coexistence (Jaeger, 1957). In the same sense, we have evidence from ancient civilizations that shows how the elders prepared young people for life, for adulthood and for their incorporation into society. From where it can be said that the origin of the idea of human flourishing, in the form of a certain concreteness of the human to be achieved in each one, is found in the remote past and in ancient civilizations, as much as it is still present among us, since it is an activity proper to our humanity.

A second consideration about the origin of the idea refers to the way in which it responds to present circumstances. If an idea takes root in a community, it is because it is useful for expressing a thought that is shared by the majority. Why has flourishing, as a human ideal, recently managed to position itself as a common reference for disciplines as diverse as philosophy, ethics, literature, medicine, psychology, law, politics and economics? Perhaps because it brings with it something that was missing. Perhaps the opportunity to overcome the specialization that has prevailed in the professions and sciences for years, replacing it with collaboration on shared goals of greater scope. By realizing that flourishing demands the cooperation of different sciences and epistemic communities, it is understood that specialties are not ends in themselves, but means for the progress of society. In other words, the dissemination of the concept of human flourishing is related to the age-old problem of the cultural crisis of post-industrial capitalist society, rich in knowledge and resources, both economic and technological and political, but unable to respond satisfactorily to the yearnings for happiness, justice and freedom, which are at the heart of the modern mentality².

For this reason, the dissemination of the ideal of Human Flourishing cannot be limited to a scientific or individualistic vision, but must strive to understand the depth of the issues to which it relates. The poverty of millions of human beings, the degradation of the environment, the regression of political systems, the loss of the sense of life or vital purpose, are some of the problems that are in sight, through which the path that will lead to the flourishing of humanity will have to pass.

The evolution of this idea

The human ideal of an era can be traced in its cultural creations, in such a way that the milestones of that ideal are also the high points of the history of culture. For the Western

² The demonstration of this thesis exceeds the limits of this document, however, it can be pointed out that it is a common notion in the analysis of modern culture. Examples are found throughout the twentieth century, from phenomenological and existential analysis (E. Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 1936; M. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, 1954; H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 1958); critical theory (T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1947); American sociology (Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, 1976) to postmodern thought (Marshall Berman, Habermas, Deleuze, and others).



Culture, the conceptual journey traditionally begins in what we call classical antiquity, in Greece and Rome, from whom we inherited the idea of virtue. Aware that there are nuances that now escape us, we recover from this concept the belief that human excellence can be achieved through teaching and learning³; that is, with the appropriate education, anyone can be excellent or virtuous. This concept is so powerful that it survived the demise of the ancient world, thrived in the European Middle Ages and is still alive today, forming part of academic reflections and proposals, albeit in a somewhat different language and with a greater scientific knowledge base.

The cultural transformation that gave rise to Christianity took place in approximately the same Greco-Latin geographic area; for more than a thousand years, Christianity was unrivaled in its religious and moral pedagogical proposal. In the theocentric society, the religious dimension was a determining factor for flourishing, but this did not only occur in the Middle Ages, but also today in communities organized around a religious vision. A fundamental problem to be solved in these cases is that of the relationship between faith and knowledge, expressed in turn in the tension between religion and science, or between church and state. These problems are not completely overcome today: there are extreme expressions of religious fundamentalism; and on a more intimate level, it is a question of the balance that the person must find between the different dimensions of his life experience, between the satisfaction of his more earthly desires and needs and his more spiritual ones.

Perhaps more relevant to the present topic, religions comprise only some of the forms of spirituality and transcendence. Today, forms of spirituality are emerging that may maintain links with traditional religious forms, although they are not limited to them; there is a growing number of people who ascribe to traditions different from those of their community of origin, they form their own eclectic, syncretic, ecumenical version or, as J. Haidt would say, find a form of divinity with or without God. This is attested to by the interest in mindfulness and other forms of inner practices, as well as religious-philosophical disciplines such as, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. Apparently, the human mind finds "steadiness, stability and balance" (W. James)⁴, a foundation of inner unity that has important effects on subjective well-being. Among the classics of psychology, Frankl, Jung and Maslow have argued for the influence of some spiritual or transcendent aspect on human well-being.

Despite the nineteenth-century objection that religions are means of control aimed at social conformity, research has found that religious practices can give meaning to life, "reducing the emptiness and anomie present in developed societies, they function as coping strategies that favor the reduction of depression and anxiety and the increase of self-esteem, empathy, emotional self-regulation and perspective taking" (Martinez, 2006). French and Joseph (1999) found a relationship between religiosity, happiness and life purpose. These effects are being more valued, even the business world seems to find beneficial effects, for example, favoring the development of collaborators results in the development of the company.

³ "The virtues are not born in us either naturally or contrary to nature, but being naturally able to receive them, we perfect them in us by custom." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 2, Ch. 1

⁴ Jonathan Haidt reports that both W. James (*The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1902) and A. Maslow (*Religions, Values and Peak Experiences*, 1964) valued religious experiences as borderline experiences that actualize a possibility of the human mind. Haidt states that research on moral emotions led to conclude that the human mind perceives divinity and the sacred, whether or not God exists (*The Happiness Hypothesis*, 2006).



The idea of flourishing is related to the general state of knowledge of each era. From Antiquity to the Renaissance, in the Enlightenment and in today's Modernity, Western societies have entrusted reflection on the goals of human life to philosophy, religion and lately to science. However, the first subject of interest for modern scientists was nature, the multiplicity of non-human beings (both Descartes, labeled a rationalist, and Francis Bacon, labeled an empiricist); then the moderns became interested in the practical, or rather technical, uses of knowledge. The scientific study of the human being as a human, that is to say, in what is non-natural, was approached only after those technical issues. We are not referring to the scientific study of human beings as nature, for this has been continuously studied by biology and all its derivations, including medicine; but to the study of questions about the good life and the meaning of life, moral good and bad, transcendence, value, love, and beauty. All these are studied in new forms in modern psychology.

In contemporary times, the idea of human flourishing is being distinctly employed, with knowledge of different kinds entering the conversation. On one hand, the tradition is well established in philosophical, religious and ethical studies; on the other, an influential group of specialties in public affairs has taken over as the driving force behind research on human flourishing: first, the economic sciences, especially the so-called development economics, where reflections on freedom, poverty, equality, rights, agency and the yearning for happiness have fruitfully converged.

A third movement around the idea of human flourishing is so recent that it is taking place at this very moment: it is the one manifested by the health sciences in general and mental health in particular. The most widespread current in this regard is positive psychology, whose founder and spokesman has titled his most influential book precisely with this verb, *Flourish* (Seligman, 2011). Now, the genealogy of the term *human flourishing* can be traced in psychology. The immediate antecedent is the widely used concept of "human development", which owes much to the humanistic psychology movement that emerged in the middle of the last century (among its most distinguished authors are Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, Fritz Perls and Victor Frankl), although it has been enriched subsequently thanks to abundant and varied research. In short, human development seen from the perspective of psychology can be understood as the realization of each person's potential in his or her own environment. When combined with the social aspects, we obtain the two clamps of the current idea.

Human Flourishing in the present

The current idea of Human Flourishing is heir to several traditions, it is not the heritage of a single scientific or humanistic discipline. In recent years there has been an evident increase in academic production around this concept, in different fields, especially in the humanities (philosophy, religion, ethics), social sciences (economics, law, politics) and health sciences (medicine, psychology)⁵. This suggests that the concept has a transdisciplinary character, even if a conversation between the different fields of expertise is not yet clearly observed. The different issues related to human flourishing are studied according to different scientific paradigms, such that emotional health is the task of psychology, supported by the biological

⁵ These are the fields that contribute the more to academic literature according to an exploratory analysis recently published. Cebal-Loureda, Tamés-Muñoz & Hernández-Baqueiro; "The Fertility of a Concept: A bibliometric Review of Human Flourishing" (2022).



sciences, especially neurosciences, while the idea of well-being attracts mainly the social sciences, including economics, politics, and law.

According to the above division, it can be said that the concept comprises two approaches. One is centered on the individual, the other on his or her environmental conditions. In this way, the dynamics that have their center in the individual are studied, such are mainly the approaches from neurosciences, psychology, and some moral proposals. Some of the main themes of this perspective are the idea of virtues, subjective well-being or happiness, emotional health, and mental health in general.

With the other approach, the individual can flourish in the right environment, which is first and foremost social and political, but also material (material refers to environmental conditions as much as to livelihoods). Among the main components of this perspective are the idea of social justice, capabilities, human rights, gender equality and sustainable development. These concepts encompass a multitude of social initiatives at all levels, from those promoted by international cooperation agencies to the local causes of many civil organizations and individuals.

This last aspect is a feature of the way the concept is understood today, insofar as it is a claim of generalized validity. It is not only an ideal accessible to a few: unlike in the past, today the ideal is held that every person must have the necessary conditions to flourish. The social effort is slowly moving towards the realization of such conditions, with the responsibility of the State, but also with a growing and more mature participation of other social actors, such as companies, civil organizations, universities, social movements, and individuals. However, collectivism is not implied: everyone should be free to determine the meaning and way to flourish for themselves, given certain minimum necessary conditions in the social and material environment. It is a complex dialectic in which we go from the common idea of happiness, which entails subjective elements of personal satisfaction, choice and fulfillment, to more sophisticated notions about objective conditions, both situational and systemic (related to the Market, the State and other large institutions).

Knowing that we are omitting important proposals, we will mention only the most representative of the two approaches, which are oriented, respectively, toward the individual and toward the community.

Human Flourishing from the perspective of Positive Psychology

Of the two aforementioned perspectives, the positive psychology movement is the most widespread and influential individual-centered approach. Its founder and main disseminator is the American psychologist Martin Seligman, who in 1998, as president of the American Psychological Association, kicked off what is considered a reorientation of the activity of mental health professionals. According to this perspective, psychologists and psychiatrists would have devoted themselves to the alleviation of illness but neglected the task of helping most people, who are not ill, to achieve happiness or flourishing. The new task of psychology, according to this perspective, is to discover the ways for achieving flourishing and make them available to the general population. Psychology may not have neglected this task entirely before but, in any case, the scientific style of the movement and its undeniable capacity for popularization have given it great notoriety among the public; so much so that it falls, sometimes, into the lack of accuracy that comes with vulgarization.



The synthesis of the proposals of positive psychology is presented by Seligman in *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*, published in 2011. It is new because the author corrects his own theory of happiness, presented in 2005 in *Authentic Happiness*. In 2005, he proposed that the goal of psychology was to increase satisfaction with life, that is, happiness, and that "happiness can be analyzed and divided into three elements that we choose for themselves: positive emotion, engagement, and meaning" (Seligman, 2005). In his second theory, the term happiness is replaced by the term well-being, to integrate two more components: positive relationships and achievement; but also, to emphasize that subjective appreciation is not enough to define well-being, but well-being must consist in measurable things. This last version of well-being or flourishing gives rise to the PERMA model (from Positive emotions, Engagement, Relations, Meaning and Achievement).

The first of these components, positive emotions, is one of the best known aspects of the positive psychology, as it acquired a leading role thanks, in part, to the contributions of Barbara Fredrickson⁶.

Another notable aspect, dating back to the early years of the movement, was the renewal of the role of virtues. This is the key aspect of *Authentic Happiness*, although the reference work in this regard is a collaboration of Seligman and Peterson, a manual for the development of virtues and character strengths⁷. This proposal was drawn on the traditional virtues scheme, of Aristotelian origin, but is supported by recent empirical evidence, in addition to its therapeutic approach: the book seeks to function as a diagnostic manual, in the manner of the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders), continuously reworked by the American Psychiatric Association, but dedicated to the positive aspects of the personality (strengths) instead of the negative ones (illnesses).

Positive psychology is not blind to factors external to the individual that influence his or her flourishing. It is clearly established that it deals with three issues: positive subjective experiences (positive emotions); positive personality traits (virtues); and positive institutions (families, schools, businesses, communities and society in general); articulated in a broader proposal than mere satisfaction with life, in the goal of well-being. However, the level of detail provided by positive psychology about the group of social factors is less detailed than for virtues and emotions, understandably, since these are subjects that are more distant from psychiatry and clinical psychology.

Human Flourishing from the Capabilities Approach

For more details on the social aspects of flourishing, we must turn to the social sciences. Surely, the most relevant movement is the one represented by the capabilities approach, proposed by Amartya Sen at the end of the last century. Like the positive psychology movement, it began in a specialized academic environment, but broke its limits to become present in a more far-reaching practice. The beginning of the proposal is associated with the theory of economic development. Sen proposed that conventional ways of measuring

⁶ She is the author of the most cited and controversial paper on human flourishing: B. Fredrickson: "The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions". *American Psychologist* (2001)

⁷ Peterson, Ch. & M. Seligman (2004). *Character Strengths and Virtues*. American Psychology Association & Oxford University Press.

development were inadequate for understanding the phenomenon. He was referring to an econometric question: how much does the measurement of gross domestic product inform about the development of a society? Very little indeed. Development is about people's actions. This was even noticed by Adam Smith, he says, who argued that the skills of the population are determinants of labor, the main factor of wealth generation.

Following a somewhat winding but very clear path, we come to see that the key to know and promote in order to generate wealth is the capabilities (capacities plus skills) of the population. But there is also a resolute reorientation of activities, since it is absurd to argue that the *raison d'être* of the economy is the economy itself. On the contrary, prosperity is such when it strengthens the freedom and agency of human beings. Sen states: "development is ultimately the expansion of the capacity of the population to engage in freely chosen and valued activities; it would be totally inappropriate to see human beings as 'instruments' of economic development" (Sen, 1998).

An important moment in the gestation of this capability approach was Sen's dialogue with the American thinker John Rawls. Generally recognized as the revivalist of liberal political philosophy, Rawls attracted academic discussion with his book *A Theory of Justice* (1971). There, Rawls declares that, in order to be considered just, any society must establish in its founding rules access to primary goods, which include both minimum material goods as well as freedoms and rights. This idea is close to the now common notion of universal rights, but also essential to it is the vindication of freedom as a *sine qua non* condition of a just society. But Sen would add, substantive freedom necessarily implies people's capacity for choice and effective action. The capability approach seeks precisely to increase people's capacity to make free, meaningful and effective choices: "The expansion of human capabilities (...) affects the scope of human freedoms, social welfare and quality of life" (Sen, 1998).

The coupling with the Human Flourishing approach receives a reinforcement in the voice of Martha Nussbaum. This author began her career as an expert in classical ethics⁸, but worked with Sen's theories to incorporate and expand the capabilities perspective, recovering the notion of virtue, while at the same time taking charge of the conditions of today's world. Her most direct work in this regard is her book *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (2011).

The collaboration between the philosopher and the economist inspired many, while highlighting the real conditions of marginalization of many communities. According to Nussbaum, living conditions can be such that they are unacceptable for human beings: people need to have the capabilities to function in their own community⁹; if they do not have them, then they cannot be said to lead a properly human life or, at any rate, it is not a good life. She affirms that it is the task of society, and of nation-states in particular, to provide the conditions that allow people to function, integrating the cultural and environmental coordinates of the various cultures and communities.

One effect of these proposals is the observable change in international development econometrics. Although still used as an indicator of economic growth, GDP is no longer the only relevant factor for judging the development of society. Instead, the United Nations has established the Human Development Index, which better describes the social reality by

⁸ Respected scholar in Hellenistic philosophy, her 1994 book *The Therapy of Desire* is a tribute to Aristotle's and Stoicism's formative ideals.

⁹ In the language of the capabilities approach, functionings are a set of things that a person manages freely to do or to be in life.

including, in addition to the more economic aspect, the components of life expectancy and education¹⁰. Going deeper, the World Happiness Report includes the above components but adds a variety of factors, such as social support, generosity, presence of corruption, among others. All this points to understand the real capacity to make meaningful choices for people, being meaningful that which in their own culture is recognized as such, experiencing satisfaction for it.

The idea that people flourish within communities, that communities must flourish for their members to flourish, and that communities have their own cultural profile, has been well received in other theoretical currents, such as communitarianism, republicanism, and neo-Marxism (Dieterlen, 2007). The explanations of each current are different from each other, being possible to find more affinities between some of them, as it can be between Rawls' liberalism and Sen and Nussbaum's capability approach. For its part, Taylor's republicanism emphasizes the strengthening of local communities, the realization of the "we" rather than the "I" (Michael Walzer, Michael Sandel and Charles Taylor are representatives of this current). Neo-Marxism also claims flourishing as its own utopia, especially in the face of the challenge of poverty in the countries of the South, despite being heir to an economic tradition. Its emphasis on the importance of needs adds an element to the idea of human flourishing (Boltvinik, 2005).

Human Flourishing from the perspective of sustainability

Finally, the perspective of sustainability has recently been added to the context of the idea of Human Flourishing. The awareness that human beings are part of ecosystems has had a definite boost in the wake of the environmental crisis. One of the voices expressing the new ecological awareness has been Hans Jonas, who introduced the principle of responsibility in contemporary ethics¹¹. The subtitle of some editions of Jonas's best-known book (a true best-seller in philosophy) is very educational: In search of an Ethics for the Technological Age. It is a very direct critique of the excesses of modern societies, unbridled in the thoughtless use of technology. In short, the imperative proposed by this author indicates that actions must be conditioned in such a way that their consequences are compatible with the permanence of a truly human life on Earth. Human beings evolved on a planet with unique characteristics, and only on this planet can they continue to be what they are. Hence, the preservation of natural ecosystems obeys, perhaps, a conservationist desire, but in a more forceful way, to the fact that it is a requirement for authentically human life.

The principle of responsibility is associated with concrete initiatives related to nature at the international level. Public awareness of the ecological emergency can be dated back to 1987, when the United Nations Special Committee on the Environment published the document *Our Common Destiny*, also familiarly known as the *Brundtland Report*, which propagated the idea of sustainable development. Pragmatically, the report established the rule that

¹⁰ "The HDI was created to emphasize that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone [...] HDI is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living". UNDP webpage "Human Development Index": <https://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi>. Accessed on March 22, 2022.

¹¹ Hans Jonas (1979). *Das Prinzip Verantwortung* (The Imperative of Responsibility. The University of Chicago press, 1984).

technological, economic and scientific initiatives should preserve for future generations at least the same natural resource endowment that we enjoy today. These ideas - sustainability and responsibility - have not only lost none of their validity in the years since they were proclaimed but have become more urgent; they correspond to a growing awareness, more pronounced among the younger generations, that not everything that can be done should be done, and that we have a responsibility for the planetary future. The succession of diplomatic summits, instruments of international legislation, protocols and other measures on the environment testify to the relevance and importance of ecosystems for human survival and flourishing.

III. Our institutional definition of Human Flourishing

By sharing the idea of Human Flourishing, we seek to facilitate the understanding and operations of the Tec de Monterrey community. This does not imply a dogmatic pretension, nor the desire to discourage the discussion inherent to university life. On the contrary, by offering an initial definition, we can expect criticisms that will improve both discourse and practices. Each specialized area may require a specific appropriation that addresses its objectives, resources and field of work, whether it deals with research, students, collaborators or audiences outside school life.

This is the proposed definition:

Human flourishing is the process of developing the person's capacities, strengths and virtues in the different areas of life*. It is a conscious process that responds to personal convictions, purpose and actions and it is interrelated with the conditions of its social and environmental context. Its achievement contributes to the construction of a better world, making it a valuable goal in itself.

* (Seven areas have been listed in the Integral Well-being model of Tecnológico de Monterrey: physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, social, occupational and financial).

In the following, the meaning of the elements of the above definition is proposed, with the purpose of subsequent determinations detailing it, as far as convenient, to a particular area of practice. In this way, the common definition is less specific than the applications, but it allows to establish a shared purpose in areas where, possibly, it was not contemplated before and, above all, it invites to cross the boundaries that often divide the various specialties (health, academia, sports, economics, among others).

Human Flourishing is a developmental process

Humans are formed from what has been received, both naturally and culturally¹². Consequently, humans are not given in opposition to nature but thanks to it, but it is different from nature by itself. Being proper to human animals, it is not reduced to pure nature but participates in the symbolic, cultural, social, political, and spiritual. Thus, flourishing does not

¹² Saved the universality of human dignity, which corresponds to every person, regardless of cultural differences and developments.

consist only in the satisfaction and development of natural needs, but also of human needs and capacities.

Human Flourishing has been described as a process and not as something static. This is due, in the first place, to the fact that the person himself is a process. Childhood, adolescence, youth, maturity, and old age mark stages of vital development in which the person changes in his or her needs, interests, beliefs, and activities. In accordance with this reality, their flourishing also shifts throughout their development. On the other hand, although there are models of human development that mark the stages through which all people pass, there are also more personal aspects and others that are strongly influenced by cultural factors. Thus, for example, the goals or ideals towards which a person may be directed are mutable, and it is to be expected that over the course of a lifetime, the person will modify his or her activities due to new religious, philosophical, political, scientific, occupational, or other beliefs. The goals and values that correspond to the ways of life are innumerable, including cultural and communal as well as individual ones.

Therefore, it has been proposed that this is a culturally dependent process, but it cannot be contrary to the natural limits and possibilities of people: “There are potentials that human beings need to be able to develop and enact to say that they are flourishing, but human beings also have their own views, preferences and desires about the way in which they best develop and enact their potential” (De Ruyter, Oades, & Waghid, 2021).

Although the natural or biological aspects of flourishing change in an obvious way by the simple passage of bodily life, one can also appreciate the transformations in the symbolic and social dimensions of the person: forms of government, social rules, productive activities, sciences, arts, fashions, and tastes. But in these cultural dimensions, growth does not occur automatically, as in the development of the body, but implies a process of self-cultivation at the individual level¹³; as well as the promotion of enabling conditions for acting as a person, at the social level.

Consequently, human flourishing is based on real elements, on transformations that take place both in the individual (e.g., his state of health, his educational level, his skills and beliefs) and in his social world (e.g., his access to goods to satisfy his natural and human needs, the variety and quality of his relationships with other people, the presence of political and economic conditions that prevent or allow him to act freely, among others).

Capabilities, strengths and virtues in the various areas of life

The language of capabilities, strengths and virtues is intended to reflect different perspectives on the realization of people's potential. The term "capabilities" is possibly the most complex of those mentioned here. One meaning has been popularized by the contributions of the capabilities approach of Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum and the United Nations Development Program, referred to above. Although capabilities lie with individuals, it is clearly not an individualistic approach, because without the required enabling social conditions, the individual cannot exercise the skills he or she possesses (e.g., a university graduate who cannot find a job might find livelihoods but will hardly be flourishing). This

¹³ Michel Foucault is an obligatory reference due to his notion of the care of the self, traced by him in his study on the formation of the subject (*The History of Sexuality, vol 3: The care of the self*, 1986)



approach recognizes that social conditions are necessary for the effective agency of individuals.

From the capabilities approach it follows that Human Flourishing is a process that consists partly in the generation of the enabling conditions necessary for effective agency, i.e., for people to be free to choose the way of life that best suits them, and the possibility of acting for its realization, by having the necessary resources, knowledge and skills.

Another meaning implicit in the idea of capabilities or capacities is their relationship with human needs. As Julio Boltvinik has pointed out, it makes sense to speak of the development of capabilities because, through them, human needs are satisfied (Boltvinik, 2005). In this same line of reasoning, it is appropriate to recover the idea of needs proposed by Maslow: the full potential of people unfolds in relation to the hierarchy of needs, from physiological needs to those of transcendence and self-actualization, as illustrated by the well-known pyramid proposed by this psychologist. The satisfaction of needs in the person occurs to the extent that he or she develops specific capacities, increasingly more distant from the biological level and, therefore, increasingly closer to transcendence, spirituality or self-realization¹⁴. Ultimately, this is an anthropological question: what human beings need derives both from what they are and from what they can become.

The terminology "strengths and virtues" is part of the now renewed tradition of virtue theories. The two words are often used in the manner of positive psychology, so that the idea of virtue is related to philosophical, ethical, and religious traditions, while strengths are the specific concretions found in individuals, which may vary from one social group to another¹⁵. They have in common that these are traits potentially accessible to individuals, which can be developed according to individual efforts and dispositions and favorable or unfavorable environmental circumstances, especially regarding education. To some extent, the competency-based education model that Tec de Monterrey has been supporting since 2015, is indebted to this tradition.

The person at the center

Another theoretical framework comes into play when referring to persons. The idea of person implies more than mere individuality; the latter is quantitative while the former denotes an essence. Here are some examples: persons are said to have dignity, i.e., final character for actions; persons are holders of rights, of citizenship privileges and other social and political prerogatives; whereas the individual is only the minimum unit of count, e.g., with individuals, population statistics are made. Of course, each person is an individual from the accounting point of view, but he or she is also a qualitatively different entity by virtue of aspects of his or her personality (competencies, beliefs, habits, values) and position in life (rights, relationships, wealth, among others). This is referred to in numerous academic and

¹⁴ "Not all adults have developed the seven needs [of Maslow's scheme]: the "poor" (in the conventional sense...) may be dominated by physiological needs and other needs may be almost non-existent. People who are not poor in economic terms may have been trapped in some unmet need, such as affection, and have not developed the need for esteem or self-realization; many do not develop aesthetic needs and, as for cognitive ones, most of them remain at the elementary levels" (Boltvinik, 2005. This quote is originally in Spanish.)

¹⁵ The classification of Peterson and Seligman (2004) establishes six groups of virtues among which are 24 more specific strengths. The six central virtues of character are wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence.



common-sense observations that recall the fact that a personality is only arrived at because of social interactions (for example inside the school, family and community).

The different spheres in which human lives unfold can be stated in different ways, responding to different interests. In the case of Tecnológico de Monterrey, according to its substantive areas of work, there is a scheme of seven areas of well-being: physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, occupational, social, and financial, the definitions of which can be found in other documents. In these areas, and in others that may be identified later, the development of people will address two parallel aspects, namely, the development of needs (in the sense of discovering and proposing those of a higher order) and the development of capabilities that satisfy all needs, both basic and higher.

Human Flourishing is a conscious process that responds to personal convictions, purpose, and actions

When we say personal purpose, in the context of a person's long-term interests, we are referring to the purpose of life. In somewhat distant times it has been called vocation, more recently the expression meaning of life has been used. Philosophical existentialism popularized this notion, and we owe to Victor Frankl its articulation with humanistic psychology, giving it a prominent place in the theory of human development. Closer to the present, positive psychology has proposed that meaning is one of the five essential components of well-being, as described above. The UNESCO Human Flourishing team uses the term meaningful, which refers to things that are important to an individual, so that they contribute to his or her feeling of being, in turn, important by participating in them.

The purpose of life is characterized, in general, by following something that people consider superior to their own individual being. Higher, greater, more enduring, or somehow transcending the singular self-interest. De Ruyter and coauthors assert that purpose provides the individual with valuable life goals (De Ruyter, Oades, & Waghid, 2021). It may refer to some kind of community, from family to homeland, co-religionist group or the whole of humanity; or it may be a cultural value, such as scientific knowledge, philosophical knowledge, artistic heritage, nature, divinity or another that falls into this broad spectrum¹⁶. In any case, it is a defining choice for the person, something that orients and explains his or her actions.

It is appropriate to refer separately to people's convictions because it is their beliefs and values, what they consider meaningful, that ultimately determine what a good life is for them and the achievements and actions that such a life requires, within the limits of what can generally be considered valuable by different people and cultures. Again, the team formed by Ruyter and co-authors indicate in their definition: "human flourishing is both the optimal continuous development of human beings' potentials and living well as a human being, which means being engaged in relationships and activities that are meaningful, i.e. aligned with both their own values and humanistic values"¹⁷.

¹⁶ Abraham Maslow, for example, described more than thirty different meanings of the word transcendence (Maslow, 1990).

¹⁷ That research team proposes a set of "core humanistic values" shared by different cultures and people around the world, namely freedom, equality and equity, solidarity, care for sentient beings and the environment.

Note that effective agency on the part of the person is essential to say that he or she is flourishing. The mere possibility of action without the action itself produces little, if any, transformation; likewise, a person may be experiencing subjective states of pleasure (e.g., because of getting drunk), but this does not allow us to say that he or she is flourishing. Individual acting is required; however, we will insist that actions do not depend only on individual will, but also on enabling conditions.

It is a process interrelated with the conditions of the social and environmental context

The environments in which human lives take place are dependent on the historical moment in which they are occurring. In past times, physical survival was not guaranteed for most of the population. The skills required by the hunter or gatherer are not those of the human being of today. There are specific skills to perform in different environments, among which the technological environment, which determines the professional sphere and productive activities in general, is very relevant; another environment is the economic system, from whose participation almost all of us derive our livelihood; the social environment is formed by our relationships with other people; while the natural environment is constituted by the ecosystems of which we are part, on which we depend and for which we are responsible.

In relation to this natural environment, we must recognize a necessary feature of the notion of personhood: its belonging to the more general sphere of life; properly, one can invoke the term biosphere. The Earth is the only place in the known universe where we find life. Human beings are a mutually dependent part of the other elements of the terrestrial life system. As Hans Jonas pointed out, authentic human life evolved in and for the conditions of this planetary system. The vital imperative derived from this fact is that of responsibility, positively expressed as the human mission to care for or respect all forms of life. The broad scientific consensus about the crisis of ecosystems and the responsibility involved in the exploitation of natural resources leads us to the same conclusion: care, responsibility and respect are obligatory in humanity's relationship with ecosystems.

As for the social environment, people flourish more frequently and abundantly in an environment in which other people also manage to develop, and where their dignity is respected; it is more difficult to flourish in societies that suffer from precariousness, environmental degradation, and injustice. Empirical measurements sponsored by international cooperation agencies consistently point out that the best results in a measurement of happiness correspond to those countries with the best quality of life conditions. G. Leyva (2021) explains, based on data from 151 countries included in the 2020 *World Happiness Report*, that there is a positive relationship between GDP per capita and the average subjective well-being of the different countries¹⁸. Scandinavian countries tend to rank high in these reports, as well as having the best indicators on perceptions of corruption, which is related to the rule of law and government performance. Symmetrically, countries with low values for equity, human development and corruption have low figures for the happiness of

¹⁸ "The countries that are at the top of the world ranking (Finland, Denmark, Switzerland, Iceland, Norway...) they are both rich and egalitarian countries with very little corruption, where the majority of the population has a high healthy life expectancy, lives safely and peacefully, enjoys broad freedom, trusts others and is respectful of their rights." (Leyva, 2021: p. 203. This quote is originally in Spanish).

their population. In the case of Mexico, INEGI (National Institute of Statistics and Geography) has been measuring subjective wellbeing since 2012, and shows the same tendency to positively associate self-reported happiness with income and the dimensions of poverty defined by the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL).

Thus, Human Flourishing is a culturally dependent process, influenced by the forces of economics, politics, and the natural environment, which takes place in all dimensions of a person's life (in the lifeworld, as Habermas would say)¹⁹. To attend to Human Flourishing is to cultivate the necessary conditions for people to reach their fulfillment, something similar to what antiquity called the ultimate end of life, an achievement that cannot happen without the free participation of each person and is, simultaneously, the result of the solidarity and loving cooperation of many. In this sense, it is a task alike to education.

Human flourishing is a valuable goal in itself

The ideas of happiness and human flourishing have in common that they both possess an ultimate character, since they are not things that are sought for something other than themselves. However, one difference between the two is that flourishing has a more systemic character than happiness, because it cannot be understood self-centered, but is at the same time the totality and each of its components; in other words, there is no world without its inhabitants, neither natural world nor the society, being both necessarily enabling individuals to act. To make this character of final goal even more clear, it can be stated that human flourishing is the implicit mission of all social practices, initiatives and rules. From this perspective, leadership, innovation and entrepreneurship constitute potentialities with a clear orientation. Also, in this same sense, the education that transforms lives, to which Tecnológico de Monterrey aspires, acquires a new and broader scope, since it not only forms individuals, but also agents of change committed to the realization of an ideal that transcends its own limits.

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¹⁹ In the sociology of Jurgen Habermas, the Lifeworld is the place where personality and culture develop, and is supported (in some ways surrounded) by two formal systems, the Market (economy) and the State (politics). *The theory of communicative action* (1981).

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