

Schemes of risk evaluation (2) Utilitarianism

1 Debate between Rawls and Harsanyi

Shrader-Frechette discusses views of Rawls and Harsanyi, but out of their original contexts.

1-1 Rawls's arguments

Rawls tried to establish fundamental principles of justice using the thought experiment of original position. (「原初状態」という思考実験において、正義の基本原理を確立するのがロールズの計画)

The purpose of the principles of justice is to decide how to allocate primary goods of the society, including wealth, position, liberty, esteem etc.

Original position: we choose the principles of justice under a “veil of ignorance”, in which we block information on details of the society, who we are in the society, and our own preferences. (「原初状態」では「無知のヴェール」という想定の下で正義の原理をえらぶ。無知のヴェールの下では、社会の細部や、社会の中の誰が自分なのか、自分の好みは何かなどの情報は遮断される)

Rawls thought that the principles to be chosen under this condition are the following:

(1) Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for all. (他人の同様な自由権と両立する限りで最大の自由権をすべての人が平等に持つ)

(2) Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that:

(a) they are to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, and

(b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity. (社会的・経済的不平等は以下の二条件が満たされた場合にのみ認められる。

(a) もっとも不利な立場の人の利益になるように設定されていること (b) 機会の均等の条件を満たす地位と結びついていること)

→ 2(a) incorporate maximin principle, i.e. maximization of minimal value.

(マクシミン原理、つまり最小値を最大化するという判断規則を具現化)

reasons why maximin is chosen

- (1) since we do not know the details of the society, we cannot calculate expected utility
- (2) if we take the possibility of becoming the worst-off person seriously, we cannot take a risk of making the position worse.
- (3) if the sufficient amount of primary goods are secured, we do not care much about maximizing them.

1-2 Harsanyi's criticisms

Harsanyi criticized Rawls saying that the maximin principle is not a reasonable choice in the original position. Rather, the participants will choose a utilitarian principle that maximizes the average utility of the people in the society. (average utilitarianism) ハーサニーはマクシミン規則は筋が通らないと考えて、社会の中の人々の効用の平均値を最大化するという規則が選ばれるはずだと考えた。

Veil of ignorance: in Harsanyi's version, we know every thing about the society except for which ones of the society we are. Other conditions (like the lack of detailed knowledge of the society) seem to be added arbitrarily to justify the two principles of justice.(ハーサニーの考える無知のヴェールはシンプル。自分が社会の中の誰であるかという情報だけが遮断される。)

To calculate the expected utility, Harsanyi assumes that we have an equal chance of being each person in the society (equiprobability assumption) 期待効用を計算するために、社会の中の誰である可能性も同じであるという想定（等確率の仮定）を導入。

[note that this is part of the veil of ignorance; that is, this assumption is made to forbid the participants to favor certain class of people in the original position. it is not endorsed as an assumption that can be used elsewhere.]

maximin rule can lead to various irrational choices

(Shrader-Frechette p.104, p.111)

the case of taking Chicago job

if we always worry about the worst case, we can never take an airplane.

in allocating surplus goods, maximin rule can waste the goods by spending them on worst-off people even when they do not have the ability to use the surplus.

2 Schrader-Frechette's criticisms on Harsanyi

2-1 uncertain vs. certain

She claims that Bayesian-utilitarian decision-making makes sense only for known probability, not for uncertainty. (ベイズ主義は既知の確率にしか使えず、「不確実性」の下では利用できない)

In the case of Chicago flight, she claims that this is not a case of 'uncertainty' because the probability of accident is estimated as "highly unlikely". (p.107)

[if so, 'uncertain' cases are rare. the word 'uncertainty' usually allows estimates like "highly unlikely", "likely" etc.]

2-2 individual vs. societal

She claims that utility maximization is inappropriate for societal decision making.

- individual risks are voluntarily chosen, while societal risks are involuntarily imposed. (p.105) (個人のリスクは自分が自発的に選ぶものだが、社会的なリスクは非自発的に押しつけられる)

[does this necessarily lead to the maximin rule? Are people happy if they are involuntarily imposed a low expected utility?]

- in a societal decision-making, fairness of the allocational process is important. (p.106) (社会的意思決定ではプロセスが大事)

so called "sure-thing principle" does not necessarily hold for such a decision.

[why sure-thing principle?]

2-3 stakes are high

many rational people do not wish to gamble, especially when their lives are at stake.

(p.107) (命がかかっているときには「ギャンブル」をしないというのも十分合理的)

[does it not depend on certain rough probability estimate?]

2-4 problem of biases

subjective probabilities are often in error. (pp.107-108)

-representativeness (代表性)

- availability (利用可能性)
- anchoring (変更がききにくい)

[error from what point of view? if it is from the point of view of correct probability, maybe what we should do is to find a better approximation to the correct probability, rather than giving up probability estimation]

2-5 cases in which maximin rule seems rational

the fictitious case of Union Carbide (p.108)

→the result of utilitarian calculation is unacceptable and violates various regulations.

[The estimated utilities described in the case are strange. Also, utilitarians tend to include social costs of violating regulations, which reduces the difference further.]

2-6 equiprobability assumption

the equiprobability assumption is ethically questionable. In reality, states of affairs are rarely equally probable. (p.113) (等確率原理は倫理的に疑問がある)

[Shrader-Frechette seems completely miss the point of the assumption. equiprobability assumption in the original position has nothing to do with actual distribution of various types of life.]

2-7 existing rules

maximin rule is in accordance with existing rules (p.126) (マクシミン規則は既存の規則とも一致)

National Environmental Policy Act makes it clear that federal policy makers should ensure that every individual enjoys safe and healthy surroundings.

[We should note that Rawls and Harsanyi were talking about principles more fundamental than such legislations. Besides, it is easy to justify the spirit of NEPA from a utilitarian point of view. We strongly prefer safe and healthy surroundings to non-safe or unhealthy surroundings, so ensuring it produces a huge utility that cannot be easily surmounted.]