Risky Ethics

Week 2: Egalitarianism

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Overview.

Marc Fleurbaey and Alex Voorhoeve present an argument against the ex-ante Pareto principle, claiming that in an important class of cases the principle violates a basic constraint of rationality (2013). They also discuss what considerations of egalitarianism might mean for their argument. Johann Frick responds to their argument, claiming it is unsound as it ignores the moral significance of knowing what state of affair one is in (2013).

Fleurbaey and Voorhoeve's Argument

1. What form of the ex-ante Pareto principle do Fleurbaey and Voorhoeve discuss? What does it recommend in Visual Impairment Case 1?

2. Later in the paper, Fleurbaey and Voorhoeve dismiss the justification for choosing M_p over M_e based on "doing as Adam and Bill" would want for themselves. What are their reasons for doing so?

3. What is the justification Fleurbaey and Voorhoeve discuss for choosing M_p over M_e? What is their criticism of this justification?

4. What two reasons do Fleurbaey and Voorhoeve give for thinking that Teresa should decide as if she had full information? What is the importance of discussing the 'justifiability' of Teresa's decision? Following from this, what principle do they propose?

5. What does the Principle of Full Information imply we ought to decide in Visual Impairment Case 1? How would we reach this conclusion? What is the connection between this assessment and Visual Impairment Case 2?

6. Fleurbaey and Voorhoeve extend the Principle of Full information in two ways. What are they? Do they strike you as plausible? What is the use of these extensions?

7. Is Fleurbaey and Voorhoeve's argument specifically about ex-ante Pareto? Or does the argument speak to a wider debate?

Frick's Reply

8. Frick distinguishes two types of cases in which trade-offs arise, what are they? What are real world examples of these cases?

9. What is the argument from the single-person case for ex-ante Pareto? Do you find it compelling? What might be the costs of rejecting it?

10. How does Frick represent Fleurbaey and Voorhoeve's argument?

11. According to Frick, the Principle of Full Information is ambiguous in what manner?

12. What is Frick's argument against Interpretation 1 of the Principle of Full Information? Is it compelling?

13. Given an example to show that knowledge does not distribute over disjunction.

14. Why does Frick believe that Interpretation 2 of the Principle of Full Information is unable to deliver the conclusion Fleurbaey and Voorhoeve wish?

Egalitarianism and Fairness

15. Fleurbaey and Voorhoeve mentioned the prophylactic view, what is it?

16. What is the distributive justification for lotteries?

17. What might be an objection to the distributive view?

18. Fleurbaey and Voorhoeve claim that even if the distributive view makes M_p fairer than M_e, there would still be some residual unfairness. Why do they think this? Why does Frick reject this?

19. What does the discussion of fairness contribute to Fleurbaey and Voorhoeve's argument? How is their discussion distinct from traditional discussion of egalitarianism and ex-ante Pareto?

Table 9.1 The distribution of utility in the three cases

Action	Person	States of the world (equiprobable) s_1	s_2
SINGLE-PERSON CASE			
M_E	Adam	0.8	0.8
M_P	Adam	1	0.65
VISUAL IMPAIRMENT CASE 1			
M_E	Adam	0.8	0.8
	Bill	0.8	0.8
M_P	Adam	1	0.65
	Bill	0.65	1
VISUAL IMPAIRMENT CASE 2			
M_E	Adam	0.8	0.8
	Bill	0.8	0.8
M_U	Adam	1	1
	Bill	0.65	0.65