

Capability Comparisons:

A brief review of issues

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What to compare

- Capability as set of vectors of functionings
- Vectors of achieved/chosen functionings – 'elementary evaluation'
- Limitations of dominance ranking and possibility of ordering

Chakraborty (1996), Pattanaik (2004)

- Statistical versus ethical weights

Capability comparison:

Three contentious issues

Issue I: Complete ranking or incomplete?

“If the concept of freedom is to have any operational meaning it must lead to a complete ranking” (Arrow 1995, p9).

“There is no great merit in insisting that the ranking of opportunity must be complete in all cases” (Sen 2002, p611).

- Is completeness more contentious in opportunity ranking than in preference ranking?
- Incomplete opportunity ranking may be due to incomplete preference ranking (partial quasi-ordering)
- Even when preference over individual options is complete, evaluation of opportunity may yield incomplete ranking

Contd...

- Conflict between agent relativism and dominance ranking (Pattanaik and Xu 2004)

Issue II: Preference-based or preference-independent?

- Pattanaik and Xu (1990)
 - Characterisation of a cardinality-based rule
- Sen's disapproval of 'number-counting'
- Bringing preferences (in the sense of values rather than tastes) in (Sen 1991)

Contd...

Axiom R: Set A offers at least as much opportunity-freedom as set B, if there is a one-to-one correspondence between some subset A^* of set A and the other set B such that every element of set A^* is regarded as no worse than the corresponding element of set B

Note: Incomplete ranking; sufficiency; too demanding as necessary

Contd...

Axiom O: To be sure that A offers at least as much opportunity-freedom as B, there must be an element of A that is at least as good as all the elements of B.

Note: Necessity condition, not sufficiency.

[We cannot be sure that there is an expansion of opportunity-freedom unless there is an opportunity of getting a better alternative]

Contd...

- Could a different direction be taken by introducing a notion of ‘closeness’ or ‘similarity’ of options?
- ‘Diversity’-based comparison (Pattanaik and Xu 2000) or preference-based comparison (Sen 1991, 2002)?

Issue III: Capability set or game form?

- Strategic interdependence leading to contingent (uncertain) outcomes – difficult to conceptualise as a *set* to ‘choose’ from
- Capability set as a set of uncertain prospects contingent on actions (Pattanaik, 2004).
- Seems in conformity with what Sen calls *comprehensive outcome* (which includes the process of arriving at a *culmination outcome*)

From individual to group: Issues multiply

- Drawing on practice
- Inequality in functionings, eg. debate over measuring health inequality -
interdependence of a different kind
- Questions multidimensional
generalisations of inequality indices, which
are commonly based on separability

Thank you