

Capability Approach and Demands for Individual Privacy

Gunma University

Atsushi Iwai

1. Aim

This study examines the validity of CA (Capability Approach) presented by Amartya Sen, especially from the view point of ongoing social informatization which can be characterized by the high level of machine calculation enforced by the ICT like AI and IoT and by growing concerns about individual privacy.

2. Data & Methods

For this purpose, this study first divides the focus of research into two aspects (ICT and privacy aspects) and reviews previous discourses of CA from those view points. In presenting CA, Sen mentioned the need to have “a broader informational base focusing particularly on people’s capability to choose the lives they have reason to value” (Sen 1999: 63). It was expected to obtain the method to evaluate an individual value system which has been somehow ignored by the simple income-based approach. One main question in this study is whether the CA framework can remain unchanged in the accelerating change of social informational infrastructure.

3. Results

This study found that the topics with privacy aspect have been less discussed, while the former ICT aspect has been frequently viewed rather favorably. This seems to be confusing as the right of privacy itself could be recognized as a part of welfare. The reason of the scarce mention of privacy right may lie in its possible conflicts with other capabilities. That is to say, it seems to be difficult to establish a capability based social system without comparing individual value systems precisely, or without bringing with privacy limitation. It is similar to the fact that an income-based welfare system is accompanied by limitation of individual privacy with income. One possible way to cope with this contradiction, however, would be developing a new type of automated calculation system that aggregates and processes private information of individuals without any human engagement. No informational leakage would take place if such a computerized system could compare capability data of individuals without human intervention. This approach is based on a hypothesis that people feel less stressed and can be cooperative with presenting private data to non-human aggregation system.

4. Conclusion

From these findings, we may argue that the growing demands for individual privacy can undermine the framework of CA, but that the scenario somehow depends on the technological development. In this sense, designing of a CA based welfare society is related to technological issues, too. It needs not only a conceptual or law-level design but also development of an ICT based framework. However, even if we managed to cope with the privacy right concerns, preceding other questions related to CA may remain, including the designing problem of social index of capability.

References

Sen, A. K. (1999) *Development as Freedom*, Anchor Books, New York.