

PLENARY

## **ADAPTIVE BASES OF DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE: RAWLSIAN MAXIMIN RULE OPERATES AS A COMMON COGNITIVE ANCHOR IN ALLOCATION AND RISKY DECISIONS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

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Distributive justice concerns moral principles by which we seek to allocate resources fairly among the diverse members of society. Although the concept of fair distribution is one of the fundamental building blocks of human societies, the lack of clear consensus on how to achieve “socially just” distribution often leads to fruitless disputes and bitter divisions between social sectors. Inspired by anthropological fieldwork on hunter-gatherer societies, this talk argues that people’s allocation decisions for others are closely related to their risky decisions for themselves through a cognitive focus on the minimum, worst-off position. I also argue that, although often confused, people’s robust “inequality-averse” preferences in social distribution are separable into two elements: (a) an egalitarian concern about variance and (b) a maximin concern for the poorest (maximizing the minimum), and that the latter is more important to our allocation decisions than the former. I support these arguments with a series of behavioral and neurocognitive experiments combined with computational modeling. Specifically, these experiments reveal that:

- (1) People commonly exhibit spontaneous perspective taking of the worst-off position in allocation choices, irrespective of their distributive ideologies (utilitarian, egalitarian, or Rawlsian);
- (2) The dominance of this perspective emerges at a very early stage of decision making, suggesting that the maximin concern operates as a cognitive anchor almost instantaneously;
- (3) Such focus is facilitated by group deliberation, yielding more coherent and long-lasting attitude changes. These results suggest that Rawlsian maximin concern may serve as common ground for formulating distributive policies in society.