Entry Title: SHRADER-FRECHETTE, KRISTIN
Shrader-Frechette, Kristin

Kristin Shrader-Frechette was born on September 14, 1944 in Louisville, Kentucky. She earned a B.A. in mathematics from Xavier University, a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Notre Dame, and held post-doctoral fellowships in biology (community ecology), economics, and hydrogeology. As of 2007, she is O’Neill Family Professor of Philosophy and Concurrent Professor of Biological Sciences at the University of Notre Dame. The author of more than 350 articles and 15 books, much of her work focuses on ethical and methodological issues that arise in connection with technological risks to humans and the environment, technologies’ actual consequences, and related governmental regulatory efforts. She also writes on ethical theory and on scientific method.

Shrader-Frechette’s work has regularly addressed problems related to nuclear technology. She has written extensively on the proposed permanent nuclear waste repository in Yucca Mountain, Nevada. Due to the nature and extent of the scientific uncertainty regarding whether such waste could be safely housed there (or anywhere) for 10,000 years – a number that is itself problematically arbitrary – she claims that the Department of Energy should delay determination of the site’s suitability and store waste for a century in numerous regional, monitored, retrievable facilities while the option of permanent interment is further studied. She has criticized federal regulations governing releases of radiation from the site, arguing that the United States Environmental Protection Agency’s suggested radiation exposure limits, which are 23 times higher for the distant future than for the near future, fail the demand for equal protection, indefensibly entailing that we merit more protection than our descendents in spite of the fact that we, not they, profit from the power for which the waste was generated. Furthermore, she holds that the agency should not assess compliance with these regulations according to mean and
median doses of exposure across the affected population, since both these approaches are capable of sanctioning lethal doses for many people. Instead, compliance should be assessed according to whether any individual faces an exposure dose over a certain amount. She has also written on the siting of uranium enrichment facilities, the effects and cleanup of low-dose ionizing radiation from above-ground nuclear weapons testing, and safety regulations in the nuclear-workplace environment.

Shrader-Frechette has consistently defended the use of cost-benefit analysis in environmental policy decision making, albeit only where such analysis is conceived of and conducted in what she sees as appropriate ways. She believes that while its use may be necessary for rational societal decision making, it is not sufficient, since considerations such as who is responsible for creating the risk, who benefits from the risk, whether the risk is involuntarily imposed or voluntarily chosen, what moral and legal rights affected parties have, and so on, can override the narrow cost-benefit judgment. She maintains that assessments of policy-related gains and losses must be scientifically well-informed—a demand to which economists have traditionally been somewhat insensitive. Such analysis must treat risk assessment as not purely subjective, i.e., not as matters purely of value rather than fact. However, she argues, this does not mean that risk assessment or the resultant determination of costs and benefits should be conceived of as a purely scientific process in which only expert analysis counts. Rather, public deliberation is critically important. The appropriateness of lay persons’ involvement is based in the stake we all have in the outcomes of these policy decisions, in the very idea of democracy, and in the fact that the scientific judgments are often unavoidably plagued by uncertainty. Thus, Shrader-Frechette makes a much smaller role than some (perhaps most notably Cass Sunstein) do for technocrats in regulatory decisions.
Shrader-Frechette has both produced writing central to the development of the environmental justice movement and been involved on the ground in environmental justice efforts around the world. In the Congo, for example, she worked with the World Council of Churches to advise locals on how to avoid having toxic waste shipped to their land from developed countries. And with her students, she helped the predominantly African-American community of Scarboro, Tennessee – one with high numbers of children suffering from respiratory and pulmonary ailments – assess local levels of exposure to pollutants including beryllium, lead, ionizing radiation, mercury, and polychlorinated biphenyls. She has advised the United Nations, the World Health Organization, numerous foreign governments, and well as the President of the United States, the U. S. Congress, and various federal and state agencies. She was the first female president of several prestigious scholarly associations and societies.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:


