

Two Conceptions of Emotion in Risk Regulation

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Recent work in cognitive and social psychology makes it clear that emotion makes a critical contribution to public perceptions of risk, but doesn't make clear exactly what that contribution is or why it matters. This paper will explore two competing understandings of emotions in risk perception and their implications for policymaking. The "irrational weigher" conception asserts that lay persons' emotional apprehensions of risk are heuristic substitutes for more reflective judgments and should therefore be disregarded by expert risk regulators. The "cultural evaluator" conception, in contrast asserts that emotional apprehensions of risk reflect persons' moral appraisals of putatively dangerous activities. It implies that emotional apprehensions of risk should at least sometimes be afforded normative weight in law, and also generates distinctive strategies for reconciling sound risk regulation with genuinely participatory, democratic policymaking.

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