

A Metaeconomics Look at the Case for a Multiple-Utility Conception

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Abstract: The paper explores the Etzioni (1986) call for modeling human behavior as though individuals pursue both pleasure and moral utility. We examine the amoralist v. the moralist perspectives in economics v. sociology. The power of each in explaining familiar empirical anomalies is compared. The paper suggests the even greater power of the metaeconomics model that works in the fertile ground at the interstice of the amoralist and moralist programs. This unified social theory builds upon basic neuroscience research as well as philosophy that suggests humans demonstrate egoistic and empathic tendencies with *the will* finding a distinct state.

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A METAECONOMICS LOOK AT THE CASE FOR A MULTIPLE-UTILITY CONCEPTION

How can I justify turning my back on the very things that got us where we are today — such spurs to progress as greed and hatred? . . . All along, the darker side of human nature was defensible, if at all, only to the extent that it tended to negate its own values system. And, all along, there was the implied prospect that, in the end, if the darker side's downside grew and its upside waned, defending it would get hard. The end is here. (Wright, Robert. 2000. *Nonzero, the Logic of Human Destiny*. Pantheon Press).

As the quotation suggests, perhaps it is now time to move beyond the darker side toward more explicitly including moral sentiments in deliberations about the economic system. Wright (1994) has also suggested that humans carry a moral animal within, some common tendencies across all of humanity. Seemingly it is time to model this dimension of human economic behavior. This has been a main theme of Etzioni (1988) in the call to build the moral dimension into a new kind of economics, and by that of Sen (1987) to better represent ethics in economics.

One track down such a new path starts with a foundation laid by Etzioni (1986) in proposing we model two incommensurable utilities, with well over 70 citations of that paper since 1986, as well as on-going dialogues (Brennan, 1989; 1993; Lutz, 1993) and (Khalil, 1997; Etzioni, 1998; Dolfisma and Van Staveren, 1998; Khalil, 1998). The 1986 paper was also a main inspiration for what is now characterized as metaeconomics which rests on substantive empirical testing for the phenomenon of multiple utility in actual populations (see Lynne, 1999). This start of a new social theory explicitly includes the moral dimension in a kind of economics that models both egoistic and empathic tendencies perhaps biologically (and culturally) evolved in the human brain.

The paper works on a foundation of three contentions. First, it is perhaps now time to include and make explicit the moral sentiments in economic models. Second, it appears to be patently impossible within either of the two major research programs, that of amoralist economics and moralist

sociology, to find a unified theory as borne out by several attempts to do so. Third, seemingly it can be done using reasonably well-accepted concepts from both programs when carefully separated out and then reintegrated on the biological base of neuroscience (brain) research, while drawing on standard themes in utilitarian philosophy.

We start the paper with the biological basics and the simple analytics of metaeconomics. The next step is to argue the philosophical backdrop. Then, using metaeconomics, we focus on the anomalies and paradoxes identified in the ongoing dialogue since the Etzioni (1986) proposal. How will we recognize progress? As Khalil (1998, p. 614) notes

One testing ground is whether the proposed unified approach is less burdened with empirical anomalies than alternative ones.

It is my overall goal to illustrate herein that metateconomics is such an approach.

1. THE BIOLOGICAL BASIS FOR METAECONOMICS

As noted, the Etzioni (1986) paper gave the main impetus for metaeconomics, starting on the consumer and social side of the economic question. In designing metaeconomics, however, we have also drawn on the earlier work in production economics by Frisch (1965) wherein he develops the limitative laws of biological production. Unfortunately, this view of joint production has not made significant inroads into the literature, even though it more accurately describes the nature of the biology of production than what we usually find in the neoclassical tradition. In particular, in the spirit of Frisch (1965, see esp. pp. 269-278) we need to see a biological production process for something like wool

and mutton described by a set of overlapping isoquants (Figure 1). The sheep is largely biologically programmed to consume the food (X_1) and water (X_2) along the axes of Figure 1 and allocate said inputs between the production of wool, q_1 , in the isoquants surrounding path OAZ, and mutton, q_2 , in the isoquants around path OCZ, with neither the sheep or the rancher having much command and control over the allocations of inputs to the outputs. Notice how some mutton is produced at every level of wool along OAZ and some wool is produced at every level of mutton produced along OCZ. Notice, too, that the wool and mutton, in turn, are incommensurable. Wool is not mutton nor is mutton wool, yet both are outcomes, together. While we do not have space to develop the new theory of production that unwinds in metaeconomics from this base laid by Frisch, suffice it to say that the production economics of the neoclassicals seems often misplaced because of its general assumption of independence among inputs. That is, resting on neoclassical presumptions, we would draw the isoquants in two different diagrams, one for wool and the other for mutton, and treat the inputs as separable, allocable, independently controllable. The problem is that in reality inputs are essentially always interdependent and nonallocable as suggested by the thermodynamic laws,¹ leading to the reality that few economic literatures are probably more convoluted than that of joint production and joint cost theory (see Lynne, 1988, for some light shining in the direction of Frisch, 1965). Supply

¹This is becoming especially clear in the evolution of the new ecological economics, an evolution that bears watching. The impetus for the ecological economics has been primarily at the production end (in contrast to the ethics end, see Daly, 1979, p. 70) of the spectrum, trying to overcome the metaphysical character of microeconomics production as practiced by the neoclassicals. At this production end, thermodynamic reality shows inherent interdependence of the kind Ragnar Frisch understood. See Söllner (1997) for a thoughtful and insightful overview of many of the same issues addressed herein, but discussed from the physical side of the question.

looks a great deal different when we recognize interdependence among all the labor, management, capital, natural resource/environment and community inputs going into production. This is to say, real production and supply has a “community,” “we”, or “others” dimension much like consumption.

Perhaps of greatest significance to this paper, the independence assumption within production economic theory is carried over into consumption theory. Consumers, biologically, are presumed able to do the impossible of reducing two incommensurable utilities into one utility outcome, not unlike the impossibility for the sheep and the rancher to reduce wool into mutton. Independence in utility presumes that consumer products are completely allocable as between the different kinds of utility, and, as a result, the consumer has full command and control over outcomes. Seemingly a fascinating story could be told about why the neoclassical program historically has focused so much attention on independence rather than trying to model the reality of interdependence so inherent within our very own biology, not only in plants and animals, but in humans.²

This is to say, the neoclassical model, by presuming independence, could well be far afield with respect to the most likely character of perhaps all biological entities, including humans. Consumers,

²It is as though the neoclassicals, throwing a wide-net here to also include neoclassicals in all the social, natural and physical sciences, have the scientific goal of reducing nature into the smallest possible, separable elements. We might speculate this could arise from a desire to achieve command and control. To use a tongue-in-cheek example in order to make the point, we seemingly must find a way for a sheep to produce only wool (we can only guess it would have to be some kind of a dense wool ball, without underlying flesh), or a sheep that can produce only mutton (which is perhaps possible: A bald sheep as it were). In some ways, and more seriously, this is the agenda of the biotechnology program, to give control. The neoclassical program seems to be one of seeking to create what is, perhaps, unnatural independence with and within nature, as further borne out by the focus on the human side, as contended in this paper, on only the egoistic (by the economists) or only the empathic (by the sociologists) tendencies of human nature.

not unlike the sheep, likely choose to allocate the consumer products, q_2 (lamb meat) and q_1 (woolen sweaters), as between two incommensurable utility outcomes motivated by the self-interest and others-interest, jointly, non-separably. And, like wool and mutton, the two outcomes or utilities are incommensurable, as Etzioni (1986) argues in distinguishing the pleasure utility and the moral utility. Khalil (1997) offers a similar idea: We pursue substantive (i.e., material) and symbolic utility. Metaeconomics models the phenomenon with two sets of overlapping indifference curves. We pursue a pleasure utility in our self-interest U^s , and a moral utility, U^o , in our others-interest,³ without complete command over the two utility outcomes, not unlike the sheep who produces two joint outputs, albeit we see more possibility for self-command in the case of humans. In fact, it may well be the case that it is this self-command that distinguishes humans from the animals, this discipline of the will over the two utilities.

Support for two incommensurable utilities, and the need to focus on the synergistic balance, is found in brain research. Based upon the triune brain concept from MacLean (1990), Cory (1999; 2000) convincingly argues that the human brain has evolved with three overlaying parts (See Figure 2). As he notes, this modular structure of the brain (Cory, 2000, p. 386) “comprises a self-preservational maintenance component inherited from the stem reptiles of the Permian and Triassic periods, called the protoreptilian complex, a later modified and evolved mammalian affectional complex, and a most recently modified and elaborated higher cortex.” Humans initially had only the inner core, the

³The iso-curves in Figure 1 could now be viewed as representing indifference curves, with the upper segment representing the egoistic (Eg) path $I_{Eg} = U^s$ and the lower segment the empathic (Em) path $I_{Em} = U^o$. For other applications, we may choose to consider the Em iso-curves in the upper segment and the Eg iso-curves in the lower segment.

protoreptilian complex, governing the fundamentals of human, biological existence (Cory, 2000, p. 386-387), such as blood circulation, heartbeat, and reproduction as well as defensive behaviors for survival. In the modern brain, this part still represents the egoistic, self-interest. The paleomammalian (older) complex came later, building upon the substructure that (Cory, 2000, p. 387) “provided the homologues for the mammalian modifications and neocortical elaborations that followed and which have reached the greatest development in the brain of humankind.” This part of the brain is identified with structures referred to as comprising the limbic system (Cory, 2000, p. 387). This evolution of the brain led to the rudimentary start of nurturing, and holds the empathic tendency in the modern brain. The behavioral dimensions like “nursing, infant care, and extended social bonding” (Cory, 2000, p. 387) were added. These new other-interest characteristics and functions became “neurally integrated (Cory, 2000, p. 387)” with the survival, self-interested characteristics and functions of the reptilian core, leading to a far more complex life-form.

The neocortex, or neo-mammalian (newer) complex, an interconnecting overlayer, came much later, and perhaps also holds the potential for the greatest change as humans continue to evolve in the future. This part elaborates “the preexisting homologues present in the brains of early vertebrates, overgrew and encased the earlier (paleo-) mammalian and protoreptilian neural tissues” but did not essentially replace them (Cory, 2000, p. 387). It “dominates the skull case of the higher primates (Cory, 1999, p. 11),” helping to also evolving greater complexity in the other parts, and to ensuring humans could order and deal with the ever increasing complexity of modern living. Yet, each serves its original functions, inseparably.

So, we are positioned to offer the proposition that the human brain, biologically, can neither

totally separate the egoistic from the empathic tendency nor the empathic from the egoistic tendency; the self-interest from the others-interest nor the others-interest from the self-interest; the material from the moral nor the moral from the material; the substantive from the symbolic nor the symbolic from the substantive; the “I” from the “We” nor the “We” from the “I”, this latter terminology from Etzioni (1988); that in reality we can only hope to pursue both utilities, that are in conflict, simultaneously. As Cory (2000, p. 389) argues, the mere physiological presence of these two interests ensures humans are faced with “a life of inner and outer struggle, as we are driven by and respond to their contending demands (Cory, 2000, p. 389).” This struggle indeed also extends to others, all in similar states, and moves out to affect the micro-to-macro transition as individuals interact. As Cory (1999, pp. 30, 32) notes,

Here is a world in which nearly single-minded self-preservation is simultaneously complemented and counterpoised by the conflicting demands of affection. . . Behavioral tension (between the egoistic and empathic tendencies) serves as an internal emotional compass that we can use to guide ourselves through the often complicated and treacherous pathways of interpersonal relations. . . Behavioral stress tells us that we are exceeding safe limits for ourselves and others and for our larger social, economic, and political structures.

It is in resolving this conflict and stress, both internally and with others, that becomes the focus of a new kind of metaeconomics.

The task for a human is to fuse the dichotomies. And, perhaps to some extent like the individual sheep, only the individual human has the command, *the will*, and perhaps a quite limited will. We need a command theory rather than a choice theory. The individual with will (-power) . . . rationally in command . . . relieves both the internal stress and that between self and others with simultaneous attention to both the self-interest and the others-interest, as in “The Me needs a We to

Be,” in the spirit of Etzioni (1988, p. 9). However, it is also the case that “Without a Me, there is no We (Andrew, 1994).” Like Etzioni’s (1988, p. 9) cold porcupines, we need to stick each other in order to stay warm: The ego-needs-to-stick-the-empathy and the empathy-stick-the-ego, with neither hierarchically over the other. Yet, I fully recognize that for some things we would see hierarchical absolutes, e.g., Muslims and Orthodox Jews not eating pork (Etzioni, 1998, p. 604); or, Honolulu, Hawaii residents refusing to mine their underground fresh water aquifer to avoid causing irreversible salt water intrusion and damage, no matter the price of water (Lynne, 1989).

We need one more analytical device developed by moving along RRF in Figure 1 and plotting the levels of the incommensurable utilities along the ego-empathy frontier in Figure 3. Notice how moving on the segment from R to Af increases both kinds of utility: This is to say, egoistically pursuing the self-interest is in the others-interest. Intriguingly, we might posit that only the egoistic fool enters into this irrational zone. Similarly, moving from Rf to Cf also increases both kinds of utility: Pursuing the others-interest is in the self-interest. We might say only the sentimental fool (see Kahlil, 1999) enters into this irrational zone. Notice that only in the smaller region AfCf (perhaps smaller, an empirical question, really, as to how large this region might be), are the two interests in competition.⁴ Notice, too, that another ratio not usually modeled in economics must now be satisfied, namely we need to select a $(J/4)$ that is tangent to the ego-empathy frontier⁵ at point Bf. That is,

⁴In addition, whether the two paths OAZ and OCZ in Figure 1 converge (as drawn), diverge, run parallel or emerge in some other combination, is also an empirical question.

⁵Said frontier would be a standard product transformation curve if Figure 1 represents inputs, with $(J/4)$ ratio now showing how the sheep rancher responds to relative prices (p_1/p_2) for wool and mutton, and showing the subjective and moral dimension of said price ratio.

optimization using relative prices in Figure 1 represented along RRF is not sufficient to establish the expression of will, the taking of command, over choice. Rather, the individual must also work on this other plane (the distinct entity in Khalil, 1990, p. 266), simultaneously considering both the material and the moral dimension.

So, various kinds of subjective phenomena reflecting the underlying value system give moral content to prices, going beyond simply maximizing the self-interest at point A° relative to (p_1/p_2°) and the budget RR° , where $J/4 = 0$, meaning commitment to the self-interest.⁶ And, with a similar expression of moral sentiments by several consumers, we would see p_1 increasing relative to p_2 , to (p_1/p_2) , and finding a more satisfying mix (perhaps “satisficing” in the spirit of Simon, 1957) at point B' where $-4 < J/4 < 0$. The rise in price was driven by the moral judgment that it is good to buy more q_1 even when not fully in the self-interest to do so, with *the will* represented in $(J/4)$ determining (p_1/p_2) and (p_1/p_2) determining $(J/4)$, simultaneously.⁷

2. THE PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS FOR METAECONOMICS

We see a metaeconomics connection back to Adam Smith’s other book, claiming, like Khalil (1997, fn# 8, p. 497, in referencing Smith, 1790),

a normal, non-egocentric actor does not enjoy from his station the pleasures of the beneficiary. Rather, the normal actor transports himself into an impartial station, i.e.,

⁶For this case where the E_g iso-curves are in the upper segment of Figure 1 and the self-interest utility U^s is on the vertical axis of Figure 3.

⁷For the mathematical derivation of these conditions see Lynne (2000).

Smiths 'conscience,' from which he can adjudicate between his tastes and the wants of the beneficiary. In this fashion, even self-interested action is normally sanctioned by the impartial spectator within.

That is, we do not have the utility (or the production) of some other individual as an argument in this individual's function. Rather, the *impartial station* is represented in the Em set of indifference curves, *within the individual*, and is substantively different from the interdependent utility and interdependent production ideas modeled in microeconomics. We can thus avoid abandoning Smith's invisible hand concept, which Etzioni (1986, p. 181) correctly claims we must do if we stick with one-utility that includes both self-love and love for others. In fact, we reinforce the concept by recognizing two sources of value and utility, with the invisible hand now representing the moral utility that is the cement holding the butcher and baker together in productive reciprocity. We can now quite reliably predict that the evolution of a truly wealthy nation involves large numbers of distinct entities operating on the joint plane of pleasure and morality, not just the plane seeking the self-interest in the egoistic sense. And, like Khalil (1998, p. 616), we can see where, referring back to Smith, an individual "develops the norms of morality from self-reflection rather than from some metaphysically given axioms of what the moral aspect of each choice is." We can, with some qualifications, maintain the invisible hand metaphor largely intact, and the individual freely in command of self as long as *the will* is operant.

So, metaeconomics fully embraces a broad based utilitarianism. The moral dimension is given expression within the individual, and not from outside, albeit metaeconomics recognizes that at times the empathic (moral) may trump the egoistic tendencies.⁸ We also see where the egoistic may trump the

⁸Seemingly the individual would interact in or otherwise become aware of a variety of communities in the evolution of the others-interest. As Etzioni (1996, pp. 106-108), we need

empathic motive and, generally, both go forward together as Smith recognized, and utilitarianism supports. As Yunker (1986, p. 77) says it,

ultimately both the desirability of social policies and the morality of individual behavior must be evaluated on the basis of their consequences in terms of individual happiness (“utility” in economic parlance) and social welfare (which depends in some way on individual utilities) (p. 59). . . utilitarian evaluations are based upon a combination of reason and intuition (p. 60). . . The essence of utilitarianism is that the individual should take account of social implications of his actions, and not merely the personal implications (p. 77). . . (and, utilitarianism rests upon cost benefit assessment) based upon relatively prolonged, conscious, rational, systematic examination of probable social welfare consequences (p. 78).

In metaeconomics, reason and intuition are interdependent in finding the unique state of the egoistic and empathic tendencies naturally in conflict within (and among) humans. We have broadened rational choice to include the moral dimension on par with the self-interest, and propose that we do rational benefit cost analysis of the moral dimension as well as recognizing subjectivity on both fronts.

We also need to briefly mention political liberalism. A glimpse of the relationship with metaeconomics is stirred by this note by Beiner (2000, p. 25):

The presumption is that individuals or groups are more or less locked into incommensurable moral-religious commitments, and the political challenge is to get them to share a political order on the basis of whatever aspect of their life-ideals is *not* incommensurable.

So, like microeconomics, in political liberalism the focus is on one, presumed (without empirical test) commensurable field of utility. Notice how we would also usually have, however, an implicit set of Em curves in the background. It is the case, then, that metaeconomics could be used to help elaborate political liberalism and the microeconomic analysis that supports it by revealing in the others-interest

megalogues to help in evolving the moral dimension.

that set of values implicit in this philosophy. What makes metaeconomics unique from microeconomics is the need to reveal the values, rather than act as if the science is value free, amoralist, in nature. We, thus, free economics from its ties with political liberalism, or with any other value system, by making explicit said set of values. Ironically and paradoxically, by modeling the moral dimension we achieve more objectivity and thus move economics toward being more scientific, albeit the joint value and fact basis of science will always remain a factor.

3. RECENT SCIENTIFIC DIALOGUES AS A BASIS FOR METAECONOMICS

Drawing the biological, economic, psychological, sociological and philosophical together in the spirit of Wilson (1998), we now turn to examining the two main scientific dialogues stirred by the Etzioni (1986) paper. We check here if metaeconomics can help illuminate the oft passed ships in the night.

The Etzioni-Brennan-Lutz Discussion Thread

Etzioni (1986, p. 159) proposes that we build and test an economic model of human behavior starting with the proposition that humans "... pursue at least two irreducible sources of value or 'utility,' pleasure and morality." As shown in Figure 1, metaeconomics operationalizes this idea by introducing a set of

indifference curves for each source of utility.⁹

Brennan (1989) sees all this quite differently. We are to continue modeling only one utility, on an OAZ path of pleasure. Efficiency can occur only in the realm of pleasure on such an Eg path, although we can see in metaeconomics how efficiency may well also occur in the realm of morality along an Em path. In fact, Brennan (1989, p. 189) fears that we lose the efficiency criterion, entirely, with a multiple utility conception because “efficiency... makes sense only if one can infer that an individual's choice reflects the best, in expected welfare terms, among all choices that individuals could have made.” I see this concern of little note, in that the space of Figure 1 represents all such possible choices, and see little difficulty in comparing the efficiency of point A with that at point C, and both with point B,¹⁰ with the real possibility of examining the efficiency of moral choices as well that of not so moral ones.

In fact, if we put All Other Goods (AOG), a numeraire good, on the vertical axis, and consider some morality loaded good, perhaps an adulterous liaison on the horizontal axis, with the pleasure path now OCZ, we find, indeed, that the individual may have to sacrifice a great deal in AOG represented by $(y^0 - y_0)$ from choosing some C_0 rather than staying on the empathic/moral path OAZ, when the spouse finds out and files for divorce. In fact, we may, for this case, even find the Em path OCZ on the horizontal axis (not depicted) and the Eg path OAZ on the vertical axis, to make the dramatic point that an adulterous liaison could be an economic disaster for this individual. Also, with the paths on the axis, we can also now better understand how the moral dimension does indeed sometimes trump the

⁹Also, more than two sets could be introduced if needed, albeit it seems that two sets are perhaps all that will be generally necessary in light of findings in neuroscience.

egoistic act as in the absolute, “Thou shalt not commit adultery:” The individual would perhaps never venture along the horizontal axis, in light of having done the rational, efficiency calculations in the moral dimension.

We also can address the Brennan (1989, p. 190) concern that hierarchical preferences do not exist. We see that pleasure and moral utility are not hierarchical, nor are they separable sets of preferences, one “a person has for himself” and another “a person has for society or the community as a whole (Brennan, 1989, p. 193).” Rather, the individual has both concerns, simultaneously, internal to the individual. We can also resolve the Margolis dilemma (1982, cited in Brennan, 1989, p. 195) by representing his S-Self on the Eg path and the G-self on the Em path, and suggesting that the individual is both, simultaneously, nonseparably. We can also agree with Brennan, however, in not finding merit in the Sagoff (1986, cited in Brennan, 1989, p. 195) contention that somehow the “communitarian or public values” are always to supersede the morality iso-curves of the individual, although, for analytical purposes, it may be useful to insert a third set of “public” iso-morality curves into this same space to enhance our understanding of what is at variance. Perhaps such public curves could stir a change within the individual.

For example, using the Brennan (1989, p. 196) idea of external (to the individual) preferences affecting individual actions, we might place a third set of preferences for non-discriminatory behavior as another path on this Figure 1, and see how it matches with the individuals Em path. Perhaps over time, the racist could move the internalized, racist Em path to the non-discriminatory Em path, and, in the meantime, society may impose the non-discriminatory Em path with affirmative action legislation. We see no reason to not consider the use of external paths per se, in that utilitarian philosophy is served

along the internally evolving, new Em path.

Metaeconomics also escapes the Brennan (1989) critique of naturalistic fallacy, i.e., that we somehow know point B \mathbb{N} , *a priori*. It also avoids the Brennan (1989, p. 190) critique that somehow a multiple utility conception suggests “directly that some preferences are more deserving of consideration than others.” On the contrary, it is only with the expression of will that we learn of the consumers real preferences. Also, we cannot know optimality, *a priori*, in contrast to the amoralist position of neoclassical microeconomics, that any point chosen is optimal. As Brennan (1993) notes, the weakness of will is not modeled in microeconomics.¹⁰

We also avoid the Brennan (1989, p. 193) critique that Etzioni (1986) espouses less reflection about morality. That is, Etzioni posits cases wherein the individual does not do a rational benefit cost calculus, e.g., at the moment a child darts in front of the on-coming truck. In contrast, metaeconomics suggests that the parent might indeed do the calculations and rationally seek point C \mathbb{N} , and simply not know the risks of instead landing at R \mathbb{N} (with R \mathbb{N} now near or on the horizontal axis of Figure 2, with severe injury, or perhaps even death). Again, we see the real possibility of rational calculation in the moral dimension, with perhaps even quick calculations done at the time the truck appears on the risk of

¹⁰In fact, Brennan (1993, pp. 158-160) struggles at length with the limitations of microeconomics in explaining why a person may or may not eat hot dogs on some occasion with a favored neighbor, when great self-pleasure would come from doing so. Eating hot dogs could go against one’s deeply held views on the treatment of animals, yet the tug of pleasure is at work. Metaeconomics handles such matters easily, as in “Just this once, I’ll eat hot dogs with my neighbor (some path OAZ). Next time we will eat vegetables (back to OCZ),” with such vacillation quite rational. We can also handle the Brennan (1993, p. 159) call for calculating opportunity costs in either direction as faced by one day being the dieter (don’t eat hot dogs), being at that time empathic to self, and the next day indulging in high caloric foods, enjoying egoistic pleasure, and thus, again, rationally vacillating from one path to the other, as the will re-orientes the choice.

experiencing R_N instead of C_N (Figure 2). Notice that in every case, choosing point C_N (and especially R_N) involves considerable sacrifice in self-interest (envision, again, loss in AOG/income on the vertical axis), but that self-interest is also being pursued at every point along the doing-the-right-thing path, including jumping into the path of an oncoming truck. The self-interest is simply not the main reason for the jump. So, we also agree with Brennan (1989, p. 193), that few moral choices are unambiguous: This parent has a full range of choices in the Figure 2 space, all involving the pursuit of a distinct state in the two interests.

We also now propose a solution to the empirical anomaly in Sen's (1977, p. 328) "apples and boys" example as critiqued by Brennan (1989, p. 197). We can now understand Boy A, having the first choice of large apple q_2 along the Eg path OAZ , choosing instead to take the small apple q_1 at point C_0 because he is committed to Boy B. Yet, Boy A, as Sen told it, becomes annoyed when Boy B actually acts on the offer and takes the large apple. This is due to A having sacrificed $(y^o - y_0)$ to offer it, and actually hoping for the intermediate, more satisfactory point B_N . In fact, in light of Boy B tending to take the large apple when offered, Boy A may condition his offering of large apples v. small apples over time due to his experience with Boy B, and, in subsequent plays of this event, choose point B_N from the very start, having learned that the commitment is not mutually shared by Boy B, who apparently has a very underdeveloped Em OCZ path, or at least the path is much closer to OAZ in Boy B's space. We would expect that Boy A would not be annoyed at point B_N due to his now having to sacrifice only $(y^o - y_N)$ to express his commitment.

Also, we can better analyze the conflict between the prudential and myopic self-interest problem, akrasia, as outlined by Lutz (1993, p. 149) in critiquing Brennan. The individual, acting with

prudence, consumes a lower fat diet q_1 at point $B\mathbb{N}$ rather than acting myopically and eating the high fat q_2 diet at point $A\mathbb{N}$. Again, notice how at $B\mathbb{N}$ the individual is not maximizing: We might say the individual is acting with restraint between maximizing along the extremely prudential path OCZ , doing-only-the-right-thing, and the myopic path OAZ . In agreeing with Lutz (1993, p. 148), who claims it quite natural for personal (pleasure) utility to represent only a partial ordering, we now see how with two utilities we can understand the role of an additional moral ordering being in tension with the self-interest ordering, and how they play against each other, and thus shed new light on the akrasia phenomenon.

In Brennan's critique regarding charitable contributions and voting, we can also solve the paradox that people donate and vote even though rational benefit cost analysis focused only on the self-interest suggests they will not. Envision the vertical axis as a numeraire good AO and q_1 on the horizontal axis a charitable contribution or voting. We now see the consumer might well move along the Em path OCZ , doing the right thing as it were, while sacrificing AOG (income). The payoff is in moral utility, which is weighed against the effort (cost), e.g., the $RR0$ level of effort to give a contribution of $(y^\circ - y^0)$ to charity at $C0$, or perhaps $(y^\circ - y^{\mathbb{N}})$ to vote at $B\mathbb{N}$. Also, we can now see the Brennan (1993, p. 157) point that such "inner tension" is none other than an opportunity cost as represented in distances like $(y^\circ - y^{\mathbb{N}})$, but an opportunity cost calculated in the moral dimension.

Yet, in critiquing Lutz, Brennan claims the mono-utility approach models such tensions with the opportunity cost concept addressing only self-interest: We do not see how to do so along only the Eg path OAZ , and thus agree with Lutz (1993, esp. pp. 152-153) that multiple utility frameworks give the possibility for deeper and greater understanding. We certainly gain a richer understanding of the real

opportunity cost of contributions and voting, and find we have to disagree with (Brennan, 1993, p. 157) that “Any ‘inner tension’ between an altruistic and selfish act occurs because we cannot do both at once,” so, he argues, the concept of opportunity cost for mutually exclusive options in mono-utility frameworks is adequate to the task. On the contrary, every act in the space of Figure 1 for charitable giving or voting is simultaneously and jointly both altruistic and selfish, selfish and altruistic. Also, note how the two paths OAZ and OCZ limit the arena of choices to the lens OAZCZ.¹¹ Ego influences morality and morality (empathy) influences ego, a need also deemed important by Brennan (1993, p. 157). We also shed new light on the opportunities foregone outside the lens.

Brennan (1989, p. 201) also challenges Etzioni (1986) by raising concerns that “individual’s choices reflect their preferences” . . .and “these preferences should be given considerable (if not exclusive) weight in deciding how social institutions are to be organized.” He claims that Etzioni(1986) is just another example of the hierarchical and self/community frameworks that violate both premises by asking (Brennan,1989, p. 202) “that social institutions should be arranged to respond primarily if not exclusively to the moral as opposed to the self-interested ends.” Using metaeconomics, we can offer a more charitable interpretation, that, rather, Etzioni (1986) sees the need for open dialogue about the moral dimension, i.e., helping each individual evolve their own Em path OCZ. We need to recognize that individuals do, indeed, oft times freely choose to move along one of the axes, and, that individuals are motivated by the moral aspects in making individual choices.

In answering the Brennan (1989, p. 203) critique of Elster (1979) that individuals will

¹¹Although see fn #4.

sometimes choose points that may not deliver the most pleasure, we see at point B the individual has indeed sacrificed pleasure utility as compared to A°; the individual has also, however, sacrificed moral utility, as compared with C°. Yet, the person may indeed be quite satisfied, having resolved the tension. We see the moral quality of all self-interested choices and the pleasure quality of all others-interested choice. It is now possible to better understand the binding of preferences over time, wherein one anticipates not having the will-power as the time arrives to stay on path OCZ, always wanting to revert to the pleasure path OAZ. So, Ulysses has himself bound to the mast (Elster, 1979); and, as Schelling (1984) notes, the drinking guest gives car keys to the host, and the woman some time before the planned natural childbirth prearranges no gas mask, in order to stay at least within OBZC0. In contrast to Brennan (1989, p. 206) who concludes that “Proposed multiple utility frameworks are of no help...” in addressing such questions we believe metaeconomics, indeed, sheds new and useful light.

The Khalil-Etzioni-Dolfsma and van Staveren Discussion Thread

Khalil (1998, p. 614), in response to Etzioni (1998), Dolfsma and van Staveren (1998), summarized:

In my essay I tried to locate exactly the origin of the disagreement between the moralist and the amoralist position and, consequently, the scope of economics. I argued that the bone of contention is not that the neo-classical paradigm does not recognize moral sentiments, which it clearly does. It is rather about how to model such sentiments. For the amoralist agenda, commitments are no different from ordinary tastes and, hence, both are smoothly substitutable at the margin. For the moralist position, commitments are some kind of pre-given precepts according to which human behavior must be judged.

In the original Khalil (1997) piece, Robbins/Becker are associated with the amoralist agenda/position, and Durkheim/Etzioni with the moralist agenda/position. In metaeconomics terms, Robbins/Becker see only the Eg indifference curves with ordinary tastes substitutable for doing-the-right-thing.

Durkheim/Etzioni would perhaps acknowledge both Eg and Em paths, although too much emphasis is placed on Em sometimes at the cost of ignoring Eg, and, perhaps they see the paths as separable and independent in two separate utility spaces (see Khalil, 1997, esp. pp. 503-504).¹²

Khalil (1997, p. 491) claims that commitment is a taste, not a constraining institution. Etzioni (1998, p. 604) counters that commitments are not tastes, and that “Moral commitments are similar in a *formal* (his italics) sense to government controls, recognized in sophisticated economic models.” He notes how government does things like outlawing slave markets, such that the relative price for slave labor (q_1 on the horizontal axis) to prices of regular labor (q_2) has no meaning. Yet, in sympathy with Khalil, at some earlier time in the history of the U.S. slave markets operated along an Eg path OCZ. Even here, however, perhaps some empathy was at play (the empathic utility along path OCZ is not zero). Also, for empathic slave buyers, i.e., buying slaves and then treating them like other employees, we moved along an empathic path OAZ. Perhaps still others operated on the economically and socially efficient path OBZ. Eventually, however, we see both OCZ (which was forced by the war) and OAZ (the empathic individual no longer had to buy slaves) moved to the vertical axis OR.

Using amoralist microeconomics, one could reason that the real price of slaves had changed to

¹²In contrast to Khalil, it has been argued in Lynne (1999) that Etzioni sees the simultaneity in the pleasure utility and moral utility, the “I” and the “We” (see, e.g., Etzioni, 1988). Thus, while I agree with much of the Khalil critique, especially that the metaphysical cannot be the sole origin of morals, I am not as convinced that Etzioni sees the utilities as unrelated.

$p_1 = 4$, causing RR to become the vertical axis OR. The war simply raised the price of slaves so much it was no longer financially feasible to maintain same. We could also suppose, then, that it is conceivable that the moral sentiments could very much look like the financial sentiments, especially along a combined OAZ and OCZ on OR. To metaeconomics, however, this only confirms the interplay of prices and the moral sentiments, in that the vertical axis path OR represents both relative prices that fact that slavery is no longer deemed an appropriate others value.

So, while we cannot agree with Etzioni that tastes have nothing to do with commitment, as in this case of slavery, we also cannot agree with Khalil that a commitment is a taste for slavery; rather, *it is about the will to stop slavery represented in (J/4), with the price ratio also driven by the same will*. I also disagree, as does Khalil (1997, p. 493), with the old institutional economics view that relative prices do not influence rules. The relative prices and costs of slavery likely influenced the move to OR. Yet, I have to agree with the institutional view that the force does not come exclusively through solving optimization problems like the neoclassicals suggest. Individuals, instead, are seeking satisfactory rules and allocations, driven by mores and prices/costs, and conditioned by *the will*.

We can now also better understand the Etzioni (1998, p. 604) case of the Orthodox Jew (or Muslim) not purchasing pork, at any price. Consider the purchase of other meats (q_1 , horizontal axis) and pork (q_2 , vertical) by this individual. In this case, the horizontal axis would be the Em path OCZ along OR° , representing a metaphysical commitment to not eat pork. Along OR° we have to agree with Etzioni that commitment is not a taste, in contrast to Khalil (1998, p. 49).

Yet, we have to agree with Khalil, that relative prices may have a role in affecting the moral path, and thus go beyond the Durkheim/Etzioni moralist perspective that “moral norms are

metaphysically given (Khalil, 1998, p. 614).” Consider $J/4$ starting a move toward 0, perhaps due to recognizing the health benefits of eating lean pork rather than fatty beef or mutton, and, while still staying on an empathic path OCZ , perhaps now consuming a bit of pork at point Cf , where pork is shown expensive relative to other meats. Now assume the price of pork drops to p_1f , and, due to market influences, this individual moves to $C\mathbb{N}$. Notice how this individual is in fact still staying an empathic path, and is at some point where $J/4 = -4$ (Figure 2). Yet, we still might see a further ego driven adjustment, beyond the price effect, with the person simply liking the taste of lean pork, and eventually arriving at point Bf . The ego and the empathy have played off against each other, with the will eventually placing the choice on a new path OBZ .

So, metaeconomics fills the gap identified by the Khalil critique that Durkheim/Etzioni do not have a model that connects the moral to the material; it also fills the gap in the Robbins/Becker model that does not connect the material to the moral. Also, the Durkheim/Etzioni notion of anatomically asymmetrical ends, i.e., that the moral dimension cannot be thought of in relative terms, is also put to rest.

We can now also better understand purchases of “more expensive recycled, ugly paper over cheaper, more attractive regular paper (Etzioni, 1998, p. 605).” Assume q_2 is the regular paper and q_1 is the recycled paper. The egoistic, economically efficient consumer will purchase small amounts of recycled paper at $A\mathbb{N}$; the empathic consumer, faced with the same prices $p_1\mathbb{N} > p_2^\circ$ (i.e., price of ugly recycled paper greater than cheaper attractive regular paper), will buy mainly recycled paper at point $C\mathbb{N}$. Notice that the consumer could just as rationally be at $A\mathbb{N}$, $B\mathbb{N}$ or $C\mathbb{N}$: It is the ratio ($J/4$), the will(-power), that determines the point. So, as Etzioni (1986) says, consumers may choose some point $B\mathbb{N}$

or $C\mathbb{N}$ due to moral reasons. We also have to argue against the Robbins/Becker view that commitment and interests are on the same locus (as noted by Khalil, 1997, p. 494-495), and can be substituted one for the other. We do not see a sense in which movement from $A\mathbb{N}$ toward $C\mathbb{N}$ represents substitution. Rather, it is commitment tilted in the empathic direction that results in such a move. If there is substitution at all, it is in Figure 3, a substitution between self-interest and others-interest.

We also can now better address the rules/choices debate as raised by Dolfma and van Staveren (1998, p. 610). Rules can clearly influence choices. An individual within a public agency, for example, may be required to buy mainly recycled paper, within $OBZC0$, with the employee's egoistic path $0AZ$ simply not allowed. Within $OBZC0$, some flexibility is allowed for the public employee to find a satisfactory mix. Under extreme conditions, we might even ban the purchase of regular paper by public agencies, thus forcing purchases along the path $0R^\circ$ which may be viewed from the efficiency ellipse $OBZC0$ as irrational from both the egoistic and the empathic perspectives.

Another empirical anomaly arises with respect to cost, and how it relates to moral acts. As Khalil (1997, p. 496) notes, Durkheim/Etzioni's approach, "cannot express, at least theoretically, how cost can be related to moral utility." Doing the right thing, rather, is a moral imperative, arising metaphysically. Yet, as Khalil (1997, p. 498) correctly points out, a morally committed person diving into the hurricane charged ocean to save a child's toy having sentimental value is a sentimental (empathic) fool, perhaps losing one's life at point $R\mathbb{N}$ (Figure 3).¹³ We would also add that an individual not trying to retrieve the toy perhaps with a net on the end of a long pole, and thus from a safe

¹³Envision the ego-empathy frontier lower in the space, such that $R\mathbb{N}$ is on the horizontal axis, with zero utility arising in the self-interest, and all of it arising in the others-interest.

distance, is a self-interested (egoistic) fool, choosing point R. On this cost/morality front, we need to listen to both Etzioni and Khalil, and to neither of them, and consider instead the metaeconomics solution at B^M , which depends on a rational benefit cost calculation along path OBZ, and not being a fool of either kind.

We, like Dolfsma and van Staveren (1998, p. 609-610) also differ with the Khalil (1997, p. 504) idea that moral commitment reflected in pursuit of symbolic utility is only a by-product of the pursuit of substantive utility. We are back to the sheep and the wool/mutton problem. Is wool the by-product of mutton? Or, is mutton the by-product of wool? It seems it depends on whether the sheep is trying to emphasize mutton or wool. Humans taking command may choose to emphasize the materialistic, substantive side (perhaps most of the time, which supports Khalil), but they may also choose to emphasize the symbolic side (e.g., the artists and artisans, the religious and the philosophers, which supports the Dolfsma and van Staveren contention, e.g., in blood donations), yet all perhaps simultaneously express both most of the time. Perhaps the Khalil (1997, p. 504) contention that the substantive always precedes the symbolic needs to be qualified with the contention that for most of the people most of the time the egoistic tendency does indeed tend to be the main interest, although as Etzioni (1998, p. 604) correctly claims, sometimes the moral trumps the pleasure sought by the ego. As Khalil (1997, p. 495) notes, commitments entail self-integrity, self-respect: Seemingly we achieve both somewhere in the elliptical region. Metaeconomics sees humans as complex satisficers, not optimizers.

We can now also see what Khalil (1997, p. 497) means with the claim that Robbins/Becker do not model the weakness of will, “that decisions are not necessarily the outcome of Machiavellian

calculation of interest.” The criminal is a fascinating example of the problem of will. Envision the Eg path now being 0CZ and the Em path now 0AZ. Said individual can acquire q_1 by thievery, or q_2 , the same good, through honest hard work. We measure capital for either activity, starting with RR^r , shifting through RR^f to RR^o as the relative price of crime p_1 drops, with the Robbins/Becker amoralist perspective being that any individual will steal if the (relative) price is low enough. One can see the point of this amoralist rendition: As p_1 drops to p_1^o , both the relatively honest person on 0AZ and the criminal on 0CZ steal more, and, as the price for crime increases, both steal less. We can also see that the dark side of the largely honest person, represented along 0CZ (i.e., a value system favoring criminal behavior), is suppressed by the will. So, even the most honest of people may experience a weakness of will in some situation, and move briefly to 0CZ, only to return to path 0AZ, as in “never again.”

How else might we explain the seemingly inconsistent behavior of otherwise upstanding citizens who suddenly are found to have embezzled large quantities of money, and, then, upon being caught, repent, and never again return to these ways? We can now also better understand the Khalil (1997, p. 513) point that we might even secretly admire the clever thief who is efficiently weighing and acting upon the relative prices along the 0CZ path (perhaps a Robin Hood path), while we still would not approve from our viewpoint on path 0AZ. Many movies have been built around this theme, recognizing that perhaps everyone has a path 0CZ on our dark side, which we suppress through the will.

Yet, we also can see the Etzioni (1998, p. 604) point, that the “economists notion that if the price is high (or low) enough, people will violate their moral convictions, is both empirically wrong and ethically cynical.” Etzioni correctly sees that the honesty path 0AZ is often the vertical axis OR. No matter what the price p_1 , this person stays on OR: We say this honest person has the unwavering will-

power to be honest. Similarly, we could have an unwaveringly dishonest person with no will (-power) on the horizontal axis OR° .

As Khalil (1997, p.497) notes, when we realize that criminal activity is really about the lack of will to stay off the criminal path, we may institute policy concerned less with stiff sentences and otherwise raising the price of crime. We may want to counsel the person at least move toward the empathic path OAZ , if not the vertical axis. Yet, in support of Robbins/Becker, it is also the case that increasing the relative price of crime will have the desired effect: Even if the individual is on the horizontal axis, increasing the price of crime from p_1° to p_1^0 does reduce the amount of crime. In fact, if counseling does not work, with the habitual criminal staying on OR^N , we have no choice but to raise the price of crime towards $p = 4$ with the capital budget line now OR , as in “lock her/him up and throw away the key.” We need a multi-faceted crime policy based on recognizing the interdependency and synergy in the egoistic and empathic dimensions.

Gifts and grants give another set of empirical anomalies. As Khalil (1997, pp. 503-504) sees it, grants are largely material producing substantive utility while gifts are largely substantive producing symbolic utility (Khalil, 1997, pp. 503-504). Also, returning to the by-product idea, he sees gifts having to be substantive before they can be symbolic, in that symbolic utility is a by-product. Metaeconomics suggests, instead, that buying a gift, q_1 , has simultaneous egoistic and empathic aspects, substantive and symbolic meaning, with the possibility that symbolism could even be a major driving force. On OAZ as the Eg path, buying gifts is largely an egoistic driven venture, as in “I appreciate my spouse for bringing home the bacon and for cooking meals.” Yet, buying gifts is largely symbolic along path OCZ , as in “I appreciate my spouse for what he/she represents,” no matter how much bacon is

brought home or how it is cooked. Commitment determines the actual point selected, some point BR , having both substantive and symbolic meaning.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we see a fundamental frailty in both systems of thought. First, we see the frailty in the Robbins/Becker implicit claim that prices are objective, moral free, “fact measures” of value, in effect pretending the neutrality of the empathic (and moral as subset) dimension. Second, we see the frailty of the Durkheim/Etzioni claim that the moral dimension must necessarily be exogenous to the economy and always trump economic actions. The problem is, the Robbins/Becker approach leads to hiding the current moral order in the workings of the invisible hand, treated as if a neutral hand,¹⁴ and, when we use the prices as if objective measures, we encourage the status quo, i.e., the old value systems, and the expression of old will ($J^{\circ}/4^{\circ}$) in place at the time the original price ratio (p_1°/p_2°) evolved in the markets. We also, then, run the risk as neoclassicals of appearing quite doctrinaire. Yet, with the Durkheim/Etzioni approach, we run the risk of a kind of moralistic status quo, metaphysical in nature, and counter to the openness and change we need in a viable economic and social system. In fact, we can hypothesize that a particular price ratio (p_1°/p_2°) at some early time drove some moral sentiment and expression of *the will* represented in some particular ratio ($J^{\circ}/4^{\circ}$) at that time, which then became rigidly institutionalized, e.g., Muslims and Orthodox Jews were not to eat pork because of the risk of illness (i.e., the much higher real price of pork relative to that of safer meats)

¹⁴This is not unlike the “neutralist pretension” (Beiner, 2000, p. 25) in political liberalism, that somehow instituting such a political system would not influence the civic culture, the value system as it were, represented in the others-interest set of preferences. Yet, in fact, close ties exist between the value system, the underlying moral dimension, and the kind of empathy that is tolerated in the standard practice of microeconomics within the amoralist program and the standard rhetoric within the political liberalism program with its strict father model of the family (see Lynne, 1999).

at the time the value system, and the expression of will represented in ($J^{\circ}/4^{\circ}$), was decided. Over time, this institutional rigidity becomes relatively impervious to changes in the price ratio, at least in the sociological rendition of the story. Yet, in reality, harkening back to our very own biological tendencies and evolution, the sociologist's moralist claim on actions perhaps need to be subjected to the test of the market and the economist's amoralist claim of objective prices subjected to moral examination.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Alfred Marshall, who is one of the main sources of what we now call microeconomics, set moral and religious commitments off limit to economic inquiry (Khalil, 1997, p. 494). Seemingly metaeconomics could be part of a move to bring the focus on commitment back, in a move toward a unified social theory that can inquire about ends, much like the Robbins/Becker program, but yet go beyond and transcend the latter by recognizing the fallacy of economic imperialism with its agenda to explain all human behavior with the egoistic model. Perhaps most importantly, we can go beyond pretending that the Robbins/Becker kind of program is neutral in the moral dimension. Metaeconomics also recognizes the fallacy of the moralist agenda that empathy can only be expressed in moral absolutes by giving a basic theoretical framework to examine the efficiency of said absolutes; to show how said absolutes relate to egoistic pursuits; and, by so doing, to help move away from the intellectual anarchy in sociology,¹⁵ which also exists in economics as represented in an array of alternative schools of

¹⁵As van den Berg (1998, p. 434) notes, sociology, and the culture focusing sciences generally, have been accused of intellectual anarchy due to a "hodgepodge of ideas and insights. . . no basic

economic thought, each with its own association and journal(s). Metaeconomics posits for the sociologist's consideration that while absolutes are real, we also see the possibility for rational benefit-cost calculations, i.e., relative, ratioing types of considerations of the moral dimension, while giving a theoretical frame to help ask the appropriate questions. It also offers to the economists the real possibility that the moral dimension can be modeled in terms not unfamiliar to standard understanding of microeconomics that virtually all economists possess.

Brennan (1993, p. 161) offered a challenge: "For multiple utility to stand as a theory, it needs to offer more than a vague recognition of unresolved theoretical and moral problems in the study of personal choice." It seems that metaeconomics meets this challenge through the vehicle of a proven analytical device, i.e., using iso-curves of various kinds, that holds potential. The approach also recognizes the fundamental character of the sovereign consumer, and is a modification offered in the spirit of the Brennan (1993, p. 164) call for "reforming the prevailing paradigm", really "the paradigms", rather than a wholesale rejection of same. Perhaps most importantly, metaeconomics stays clear of the debate over whether one brand of social theory or another is morally superior. Yet, it does point out the need to choose among alternative ends, and to have the value disputes and dialogues that influence the nature and choice of said ends. Perhaps most importantly, metaeconomics gives an analytical system for clarifying the relationships among internal and external moral forces; addressing the locus of control; and showing a place for *the will*, thus suggesting a special link with philosophy. It embraces utilitarianism, albeit the model could also be used to examine other philosophies.

theory to structure and to sort them out, to order them, or to serve as guide for research." Metaeconomics perhaps holds some potential as such a theory.

More attention needs to be placed in examining recent breakthroughs in neuroscience research. We also need to further test the analytical power of metaeconomics by systematically working through all the various anomalies and paradoxes that arise in microeconomics, as well as in various sociological theories, e.g., the prisoner's dilemma, the externality and free rider problems, in the search for new insights. Early results suggest that indeed, again using Khalil's words (1997, p. 614), the "proposed unified approach is less burdened with empirical anomalies than alternative ones." On this basis, we perhaps can keep moving forward.

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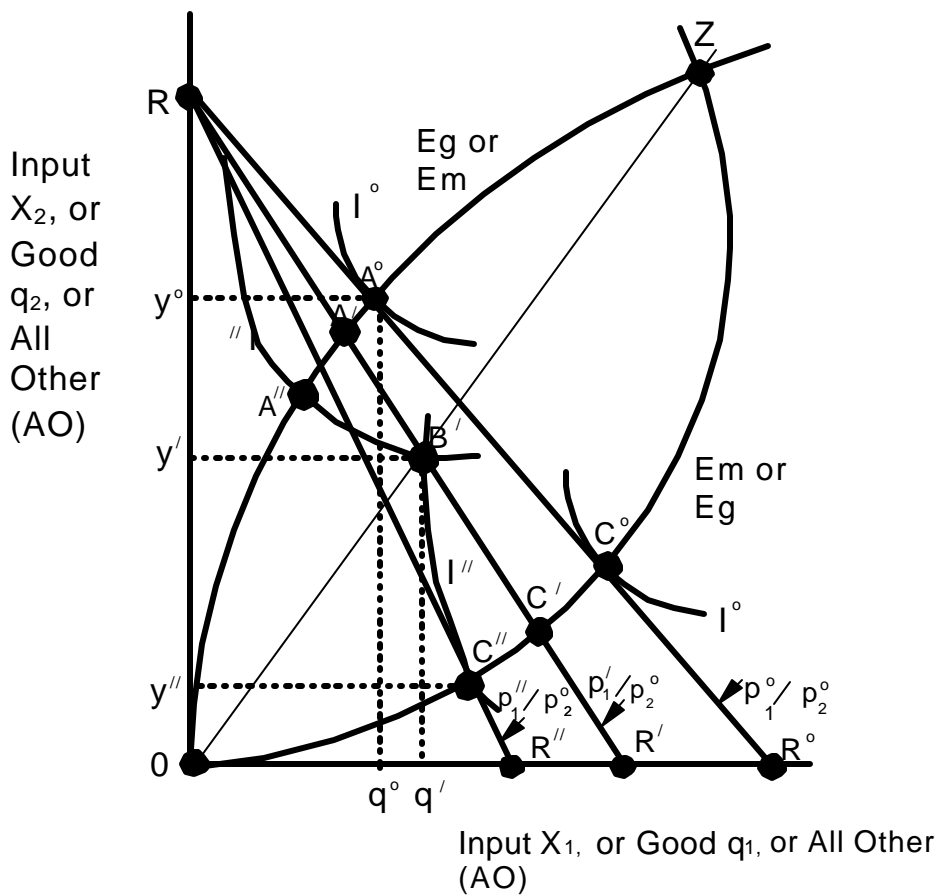
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(Note: The p may be an r , or a "resource price," when the axes are for inputs)

Figure 1. Joint self-interest (Eg) and other-interest (Em) isoquant or indifference iso-curves for inputs X_i , goods q_i , or all other inputs or goods(AO).

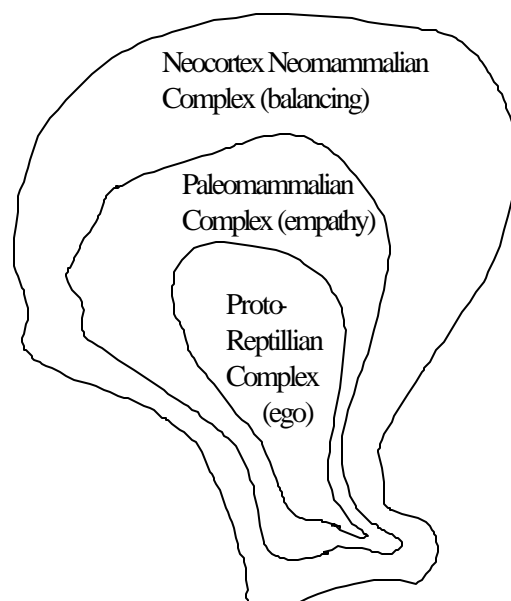


Figure 2. The triune brain (after Cory, 1999, p. 10).

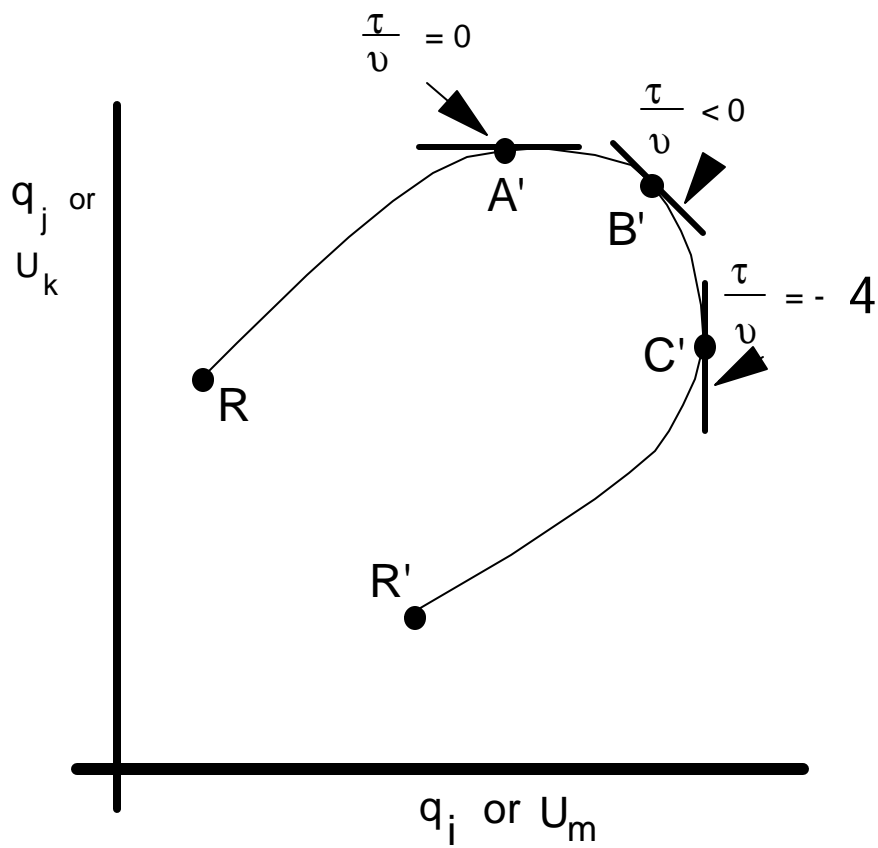


Figure 3. Ego-empathy frontier for two goods (or bads) q or for two sources of utility U .