

**Simon Blackburn:  
*Ruling Passions***

**Chapter 6  
Game Theory and Rational Choice**

**§ Philosophical Egoism**

\_\_\_\_\_ The principle of maximizing expected utility is **definitional**: a grid imposed upon the processes of interpreting others.

⇒ Theory of rational choice

**\* F. P. Ramsey's Theory:**

- 1. An agent with an ordering of preferences over each of some set of options can be represented as if she had attached measurable 'values,' called utilities, to those options.**
- 2. The provision of a scale is just like that of providing numerical measures for weights, given only the results from a balance.**
- 3. A balance is simply an empirical determination of when one object weighs at least as much as another.**
- 4. So the results of tests for whether one object is at least as heavy as another can be presented numerically, with the numbers representing weights of the objects in the set.**
- 5. The value of an option is equated with its *expected* utility, since an option's actual utility to an agent may be discounted by a probability and utilities.**  
[e.g. An agent might just prefer a 50 % chance of  $b$  to

a certain  $a$ , but also prefer a 10% chance of  $c$  to certain  $b$ , in which case she prefers  $c$  to  $b$  more than she prefers  $b$  to  $a$ . For she jumps at even a faint chance of  $c$  instead of  $b$ , whereas it takes a good chance of  $b$  for her to prefer to gamble to certain  $a$ . ]

6. **True preferences are those that are revealed by decisions. But we need to distinguish between what an agent *chooses* and what she *prefers* when preference relates to aspects of a situation beyond her control.**
7. **In general, “eligible agents” [anyone with consistent, transitive preferences over a set of options] can be interpreted with this grid. However, eligibility can be forfeited. We do not automatically reinterpret the agent to preserve her logicity.**
8. **Under this model, *economic man* is not just an agent concerned with self-interest, but any agent described in terms of concerns and utilities. [The example of vengeance—one’s revenge may not generate the most self-interest, but it reflects one’s most intense motivation.]**

[Util] – makes utility ‘logical constructions’ out of preferences:

\_\_\_\_\_ A utility function is defined such that the expected utility of  $a$  is just as great as that of  $b$  if and only if  $a$  is weakly preferred to  $b$ .

**[Revpref] – makes presences ‘logical constructions’ out of choices, given beliefs.**

**\_\_\_\_\_ Choice behavior is primitive. If a player makes choices, then he or she is making choices as though he were equipped with a preference relation which has that choice preferred to others, in the light of what else he believes about the situation. An eligible agent is always interpretable as though he were seeking to further a preference.**

**\* Blackburn’s Critique of the Decision theory:**

- (1) In the application of decision theory, interpretation is critical.**
- (2) Different contexts of choice must be taken into account.**
- (3) Different choices do not necessarily reflect different degrees of rationality; they may simply reflect different sets of preferences or different concerns. [e.g. Neo’s choice between two doors in ‘Matrix Reloaded’]**
- (4) There is a to-and-for between our understanding of which features of situations in general matter to the agent, and our understanding of how he thought about the options in front of him on any concrete occasion.**
- (5) Therefore, there is no “one most rational” choice in all situations. It all depends on the agent’s motivation and interest.**

## **§ The Problems of Selfishness [Cases like the Prisoner's Dilemma]**

### **\* Hume:**

**\_\_\_ In a large community it is a problem insoluble except by an external authority able to insist on contribution and attach penalties to free-riding.**

[The case of gun control]

\_\_\_ It may be best for me if I am armed and nobody else; it may be worst for me if the rest are armed and I am not. If we are all like that, we all arm, even though we recognize that a world in which nobody is armed is preferable to the one we bring about in which everyone is armed.

[The case of free-riding]

\_\_\_ Everybody thinks this: it is best for me if others contribute to providing the good, while I do not. As a result, nobody contributes to the common good, and the system fails.

### **\* Hobbes's**

**\_\_\_ We need a supreme Sovereign who can punish non-co-operative behavior.**

### **\* Blackburn's Analysis:**

- 1. We need to break the link between the theoretical description and empirical description.**

2. In theory, a situation is only properly conceptualized as a prisoners' dilemma if each agent is going *not* to co-operate.
3. But the empirical game is played differently: each of us has a motivation to general sufficient co-operative concerns..., because the co-operative option appeals most to us.
4. Therefore, in reality some people will co-operate, and others will defect. Neither side is rational or irrational because of that. The one person values different things, or has different expectations [about the behavior of the other], from the other. He is in a different theoretical game.
5. The world as we have it is a little mixed. There are people who jumped the queue, and people who stand in line.
6. Decision theory reflects our motivations and expectations, rather than rationality itself.

## § Hume's Solution

### \* Hume:

\_\_\_ "I observe, that it will be for my interest to leave another in the possession of his goods, *provided* he will act in the same manner with regard to me. He is sensible of alike interest in the regulation of his conduct. When this common sense of interest is mutually expressed, and is known to both, it produces a suitable resolution and behavior. And this may properly enough be called a *convention* or *agreement* betwixt us, ..., since

the actions of each of us have a reference to those of the other, and are performed upon the supposition that something is to be performed on that other part. ....  
 Whatever is advantageous to two or more persons, if all perform their part; but what loses all advantages, if only one performs, can arise from no other principle. There would otherwise be no motive for any one of them to enter into that scheme of conduct.”

[Summary]

### The Free-rider Type of Problems

<b>Hobbes' solution</b>	<b>Hume's solution</b>
↓	↓
External Sovereign	Societal Conventions/culture

\* **Blackburn: three things to keep in mind**

1. the function of convention and culture in warding off the invisible boot.
2. the relative plasticity of people's motivations and expectations.
3. the importance of providing a soil in which our future generations can grow into the right shape, if the social good is to be promoted.

**Q: What is Blackburn implying here?**

\_\_\_ We can make the future world the way we would like it to be. By educating our next generation not to focus primarily on narrow self-interest, but to cultivate other virtues such as trustworthiness, we could make sure that the society at large benefits as a whole. Game theorists assume

that everyone's most rational decision is based on monetary gain or prison term, for example, but it is not so. One who makes a difference choice from the one advised by game theorists is not irrational. He is actually successful if he operates in a society where everyone co-operates. There is no "courtroom" for judging rationality.

### **§ The Toxin Example**

\_\_\_ To take the painful toxin or not.

#### **Blackburn's Solution:**

\_\_\_ **The people who get the reward are those who can adopt the deontological attitude towards their own formed dispositions. Someone who can take an initial disposition to accept the reward as 'fixing' their future course of action gets the reward. When the time comes, the fact that this was his past mind-set survives to motivate him to perform the admittedly unpleasant action of taking the toxin. Such a person is not irrational, but successful.**

#### **[Conclusion]**

**Hobbes's problem is solved not by rationality, but organically, by the growth of habits of reliance. With this growth, given our way of describing action, comes a reconfiguration of the agents' interests.**

**Typically, a society wants the co-operative and trusting solutions. It must therefore take pains that people care about things that will generate those solutions:**

**reputation, antecedent agreement, co-operative bonding, the welfare of others, one's own ability to portray one's conduct that others can admire, etc.**

**Success needs society, and society needs trust. It is the educators' responsibility to make sure that the next generation avoids the invisible boot.**