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Comments welcome

Expressive behavior in economics and politics

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Abstract

Much human behavior appears to be expressive. Expressive behavior provides expressive utility by confirming identity that people choose to be pleasing to themselves or to please others. In issues of economy policy the identity may be that of a generous caring person, in issues of geopolitics that of being a conciliatory person amenable to compromise. Expressive behavior can be deceptive, counterfactually based, and resistant to clarifying information. I use expressive voting to illustrate expressive behavior and extend the principles to behavior that I call expressive rhetoric and expressive generosity. I consider prospects for remedies for the social costs of expressive behavior and compare expressive behavior with altruism and malice.

Keywords: Identity; expressive voting; rhetoric; generosity; deception; social cost; dictatorship game; trust game; altruism; malice

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1. Introduction

Neo-classical economic analysis describes individual behavior based on axioms that define rational behavior. Behavioral economics (for example Camerer, Loewenstein, and Rabin, 2003; DellaVigna, 2009) has expanded the domain of analysis beyond the traditional rationality axioms. People have been shown in experiments to have preferences for equality and to behave in ways that exhibit inequality aversion; the axioms of expected utility have been shown to be violated in experiments involving risk; and new concepts such as loss aversion, hyperbolic discounting, and framing have been used to explain “non-rational” behavior.

Expressive behavior also departs from the traditional neo-classical paradigm. However, in contrast to descriptions of behavioral economics, people who behave expressively rationally maximize utility. The utility function includes usual utility from material satisfaction (consumption, income, or wealth) and also expressive utility obtained from acts and decisions that confirm personal identity. In issues of economy policy, the identity confirmed through expressive behavior is often that of being a generous caring person; in geopolitics, the identity may be that of being a conciliatory person who is amenable to compromise. The identity for which confirmation is sought can be pleasing to oneself or pleasing to others from whom approval is sought.

I shall take as given that people obtain expressive utility from feeling themselves likeable and from being liked by others. Paul Rubin (2002) points to the small-group hunter-gather origins of much human behavior. The desire for a likeable identity has suggestively these origins.

Expressive behavior is deceptive when the identity that people have chosen has attributes that contradict actual behavior. Self-deception or deception need not affect others. Expressive behavior can, however, in general circumstances impose social costs. The

social costs can be mutually imposed within an expressive group or imposed on others outside the group. Because of the social costs, expressive behavior is a social problem. We need, therefore, to explore remedies for the social costs.

Expressive behavior has been extensively studied in the form of expressive voting. I use expressive voting to illustrate expressive behavior and extend the principles to behavior that I call expressive rhetoric and expressive generosity.

Expressive voting experiments and experimental evidence from expressive voting prisoners'-dilemma, dictatorship, ultimatum, and trust games confirm the extensive prevalence of expressive behavior. People behave rationally in confirming identity as charitable, cooperative, or trustworthy.

Expressive behavior is defined by utility functions that account only for own-utility. When interdependent utility in the form of altruism or malice co-exist with expressive behavior, little of substance regarding consequences of expressive behavior is changed.

2. Expressive voting

Expressive voting is a centerpiece of the public-choice view of political economy (Mueller, 2003; Hillman, 2009). Expressive voting was suggested in Buchanan (1954) and has origins in Tullock (1971). The literature includes Brennan and Buchanan (1984), Glaser (1987), Brennan and Lomasky (1984, 1993), Kliemt (1986), Brennan and Hamlin (2000), and Schuessler (2000). Hamlin and Jennings (2009) summarize the literature. Expressive voting contrasts with an instrumental view of voting in which voters are described as believing that their vote affects election outcomes. A single vote is in general *inconsequential* because the vote makes no difference to a voting outcome. The “paradox of voting” is that instrumental voters, if rational, are predicted not to vote because the time cost of voting exceeds the zero or miniscule expected benefit of voting based on the

likelihood of one vote being decisive. Expressive utility from voting can change the cost-benefit calculation. Voters decide whether to vote and how to vote.¹ The decision *whether* to vote can involve conceptions of civic duty and expressive confirmation of an identity of being socially responsible. In *how* they vote, expressive voters rationally perceive that their single vote will not be decisive in determining the voting outcome and that they can therefore at low cost (the time cost of voting) vote to obtain expressive utility by confirming identity.²

2.1 Deception and social costs

Expressive voters can vote for policies that they truly wish to be implemented. However, with one vote rationally perceived to be of no consequence in influencing actual outcomes, expressive voters can also vote for candidates and policies that they would oppose if they knew that their vote were decisive. They can therefore base their vote on principles of righteousness and generosity that they do not apply in their lives in practice. They can vote against their own self-interest to obtain utility from professing support for righteousness and generosity knowing that their vote does not matter for outcomes that are determined by voting.³

When a majority of voters votes expressively, the outcome of majority voting can be policies that the same voters would each individually veto if decisive. Expressive voters who vote in favor of high taxation and extensive redistribution may not truly wish to share their income and wealth. They may believe that recipients of

¹ For an example of the two interrelated decisions, see Fort and Bunn (1998).

² If the time cost of voting is low, voting is a “low-cost decision” that can be used to obtain an available benefit. See Kirchgässner (1992).

³ Expressive voting is consistent with compulsory voting. When deciding how to vote, voters know that their individual vote will not be decisive.

publicly financed income transfers are subject to moral hazard and that, with the opportunities provided in their society for self-reliance, people in need are more likely not to have a work ethic than to be unlucky in not finding employment. They may perceive or believe that refugees are for the most part immigrants who have been attracted by the benefits of a generous welfare state. Expressive voters are concerned about political correctness. Their truly held beliefs may be “politically incorrect”. Being aware that their vote is not decisive and therefore inconsequential in determining policies, they can rationally choose to set aside their politically incorrect true beliefs – and also their material self-interest – and obtain expressive utility by voting for “politically correct” policies.⁴

Table 1 illustrates expressive voting.⁵ The vote in table 1 is on whether two taxpayers will collectively finance an income transfer to a third party. The two voters will be taxed and the income transfer will take place only if there is consensus in favor. Abstention by one voter is sufficient to veto the income transfer. For each voter:

Expressive utility from voting in favor of the transfer = 1

Material loss from paying for the transfer = -2

Utility when the voter vetoes the transfer = 0.

Each voter is best off with benefit 1 from voting for the income transfer that is not made because the other person has vetoed the transfer. If voting is sequential, the outcome is (1, 0) or (0, 1). The person voting first has expressive utility from voting to be generous and the person voting second maximizes utility (for both voters) by vetoing the income transfer. In a simultaneous-move game, Nash equilibria in pure strategies are (1, 0) and (0, 1) and there is a mixed-strategy equilibrium in which a voter votes in favor of or against the income transfer with equal probability. In a simultaneous-move

⁴ On political correctness and political economy, see my 1998 paper.

⁵ The table is reproduced from Hillman (2009, chapter 7).

repeated game with no commitment, equilibrium outcomes include the possibility of voters taking turns in vetoing.

Table 1: Expressive voting

	Person 2 votes against income transfers	Person 2 votes in favor of income transfers
Person 1 votes against income transfers	0, 0	0, 1
Person 1 votes in favor of income transfers	1, 0	-1, -1

In actual elections, the game involves not two but many voters, each of whom is aware that a single vote is not decisive. All voters maximize utility by voting in favor of the income transfer and have utility -1 in the Nash equilibrium. Expressive voters therefore impose social costs on themselves.

In the models of instrumental voting, majority-voting outcomes can be inefficient because of voting externalities due to voter disregard for how a vote affects the utility of others (Tullock, 1959; Hillman, 2009, chapter 6). Expressive voting introduces an additional source of voting externalities because voting can result in outcomes that no voter actually wants (Brennan and Lomasky, 1984).

2.2 Are voters expressive?

Expressive voting is a hypothesis or conjecture. Are there alternative explanations based on rational informed behavior for why and how people vote? For example, do people perhaps vote to avoid regret from not having voted?

If no one voted because everyone believed that a single vote is inconsequential, every voter would regret not having voted. An outcome where no one votes is therefore not a Nash equilibrium. In actual elections, because no individual voter can reasonably expect to be decisive, regret in having missed the opportunity to be decisive by not voting cannot explain why people vote.

Regret can however confirm expressive voting. New information or changed sentiments can lead people to express regret about how they voted. Such regret is clear evidence of expressive voting because the opportunity to change a voter's decision would not change the electoral outcome. As Brennan and Hamlin (2000, p. 31) point out in describing expressive voting: "If you made a mistake in the polling booth and voted for the 'wrong' candidate, that mistake would almost certainly not alter the electoral outcome – though, presumably, it would remain a mistake from your point of view."

Indirect evidence of expressive voting has been inferred from more visible forms of expressive behavior. The inference is that, having displayed expressive behavior in other visible respects, people also vote expressively (Copeland and Laband 2002; Laband et al., 2009).

The theory of instrumental voting predicts that people maximize utility by voting for the policy or candidate closest to their ideal from among available alternatives. Expressive voters are, in contrast, influenced in their voting decisions by the distance between their ideal and political parties' policy positions or candidates' attributes (Brennan and Hamlin, 1998; Hillman, 2009, chapter 6). Too great a distance between their ideal and the alternatives offered may not allow expressive voters to express themselves adequately by identifying with policies or candidates. Expressive voters therefore abstain when distance of policies or candidate attributes from the voter ideal is too great. People who abstain because they declare that they have "no one to vote for" confirm that they are expressive voters. Guttman et al (1994) studied whether voter abstentions are due to

“indifference” as predicted by the instrumental voting or “alienation” as predicted by expressive voting. The evidence was consistent with expressive voting hypothesis: distance of candidates from voters’ ideal policies determined whether people voted or abstained.⁶

Guttman et al (1994) also found that the propensity of an individual to vote decreased with the number of “politically eligible adults” in the household, which is inconsistent with instrumental voting but consistent with expressive voting. Expressing identity can be delegated within the household and there is no need for everyone to vote when an additional vote is recognized as inconsequential.

An instrumental view of voting predicts greater participation in voting by low-income than high-income people because of the former’s lower cost of voting due to lower value of time. The evidence is, to the contrary, that high-income people have been more likely to vote. We expect low-income people to be focused more on the material requisites of life than the quest for expressive utility.⁷

In the 2008 U.S. presidential election, turnout was high for both high and low-income voters, who both often waited hours in line to vote. The high turnout of low-income voters suggests that these voters did not vote previously because they could not adequately express themselves in their voting decision, because “they had been no one to vote for”.

⁶ The study used panel survey data from the 1976 U.S. presidential election.

⁷ Generous distributional policies correspondingly appear to have greater public support in prosperous times when incomes are higher: see for example Markussen (2008). Frey (1971) linked the propensity of high-income people to vote to their better access to political information. Such information can be used instrumentally (and irrationally) or expressively (and rationally).

2.3 Other circumstances of expressive voting

Expressive voting occurs more generally than in voting to choose political representatives. The vote can concern identity expressed through the attributes of a flag (Karahan and Shughart, 2004) or identity through the choice between being the subject of a non-resident monarch or a citizen in a republic (Davidson, Fry, and Jarvis, 2006). Voting in the Eurovision song contest (Ginsburgh and Noury, 2008) is expressive; in principle, people cannot vote for their own resident country's song but immigrants can express identity with their cultural home and expressions of identity occur through geographical proximity and common language. Voting on the official languages of multinational bodies (Fidrmuc, Ginsburgh, and Weber, 2009) is expressive: governments and people want their language included because of identity. Voting in the United Nations General Assembly is expressive because voting outcomes are inconsequential, which allows governments of different countries to vote to express their identity, for example as whether in alignment or not with the U.S. or a voting bloc (Potrafke, 2009).

3. Expressive utility and identity

Expressive voting illustrates expressive utility from confirming identity. We proceed now to a general specification of utility that encompasses the expressive utility associated with identity. The general specification can be applied to cases of expressive behavior beyond expressive voting.

3.1 Utility from predetermined identity

Akerlof and Kranton (2000) placed identity in the utility function in the form:

$$U_j = U_j(a_j, a_{-j}, I_j). \quad [1]$$

In [1], a_j indicates actions of person j and a_{-j} actions of all others other than j . I_j is person j 's "self-image" or identity, determined as:

$$I_j = I_j(a_j, a_{-j}; c_j, \varepsilon_j, P). \quad [1']$$

Increases in I_j increase utility. In [1'], c_j denotes social categories assigned to person j ; the higher is the assigned social status, the better is the individual's self-image. ε_j indicates the match between individual j 's given characteristics and the ideal characteristics in individual j 's assigned social category. P represents prescriptions or acceptable behavior for people according to social category. The utility function [1] was applied to identity determined by race and gender. When c_j indicates race, schooling can result in utility loss through compromise of personal identity (see also Austen-Smith and Fryer, 2006, on "acting white"). When c_j indicates gender, utility of men, for example, declines if women do "men's jobs". Utility from identity explains why women who have market careers and have a husband (or companion or mate) contribute disproportionately to housekeeping: the woman does not wish to emasculate the man by assigning him excessive housework. In another example, gender-based identity was involved in the explanations for the emergence of specialized "breadwinner-homemaker" households in England in the mid-19th century. In proposing why gender specialization arose, Rose (1988) stressed the role of gender identity; the counter case stressing preferences, technology, and income was made by de Vries (2008).

3.2 Choice of identity

Identity defined by race or gender is imposed. Although people can seek to escape imposed identity, the escape is in general difficult.⁸

⁸ An example is the attempt to escape from the prejudices of anti-Semitism by changing the focus of identity to the communist/socialist-capitalist distinction.

Rather than being imposed, identity can also be a matter of choice, as in the case of expressive voting where people choose to behave in a way that confirms generous identity. Brennan and Hamlin (2000) describe the discretion with regard to identity as people choosing “dispositions”. Lewisch (2004) describes people as choosing identity by choosing “windows” through which to view the world. Glaeser and Ward (2006) describe choice of identity in the U.S.

We can denote the set of identities from which individual j can choose by

$$I = \{I_1, I_2, \dots, I_T\}. \quad [2]$$

Individual j 's true identity I_T is included in [2]. An identity in [2] can be confirmed by a corresponding act or behavior x_j chosen from

$$x = \{x_1, x_2, \dots, x_T\}. \quad [3]$$

The decision x_j is discrete in the case of majority voting and continuous when the decision is for example how much money to contribute to a candidate. Choice of behavior x_j from [3] is observed or communicated and implies confirmation of a corresponding identity I_j in [2]. Expressive voting illustrates how identity I_j chosen to be confirmed through the act x_j need not correspond to true identity I_T for which the conforming corresponding act is x_T . The decision or confirming act x_j can be to vote to confirm a generous identity I_j when true non-generous identity is I_T with associated act x_T .

The identity chosen for confirmation I_j through the act x_j can be self-pleasing and independent of views and reactions of others, or chosen to please others. The own-pleasing identity and the identity chosen to please others can coincide or differ. We now view the identities as coinciding: the individual wishes to feel generous and also wishes others to feel that he or she is generous. I shall presently consider cases where this is coincidence of sought identities is not present.

Expressive utility of individual j in a population of n people is⁹

$$U_j^{EXP}(x_j) = \alpha_j I_j(x_j) - \gamma_j D_j(x_j) \geq 0, \quad j = 1, \dots, n \quad [4]$$

with constant parameters

$$\alpha_j \geq 0, \quad \gamma_j \geq 0, \quad j = 1, \dots, n.$$

$D_j(x_j) > 0$ in [4] is expressive utility lost in choosing x_j . For example, expressive utility is lost through the need to posture in communicating to others that, despite having high income, one has voted for high progressive taxes and generous income redistribution. γ_j indicates sensitivity to loss of expressive utility, for example, through embarrassment.

Actual identity (for example, in reality not being generous) does not appear in expressive utility [4]. Identity is chosen to obtain expressive utility without regard for actual personal behavior. One can expressively be who one wants to be, without regard for realities of behavior or other facts. No utility is lost from increasing deviation between identity sought for expressive utility and true identity in a real world in which the individual lives.

We define the non-expressive component of utility as material utility and represent such utility for individual j through the benefit-cost calculation:

$$U_j^{MAT}(x_j) = B_j(x_j) - C_j(x_j), \quad j = 1, \dots, n. \quad [5]$$

$B_j(x_j)$ is material benefit from consumption, income, or wealth. $C(x_j)$ is material cost incurred through the decision x_j . In the absence of expressive behavior, these are the only these benefits and costs.

In the case of voting, we denote by x_j^* the decision to vote for one of the available candidates and by x_j^o the decision to abstain from

⁹ We shall not here become involved with obvious technicalities of properties of functions. Additivity in [3] and in subsequent functions is for convenience of simplicity and usual concavity properties are assigned to the functions.

voting. Maximization of material utility [5] by the binary decision whether to vote subject to a positive marginal value of time and non-decisiveness in voting results in a decision not to vote based on:

$$0 = B_j(x_j^*) < 0 < C_j(x_j^*), \quad B_j(x_j^o) > 0 > C_j(x_j^o). \quad [6]$$

Total utility includes expressive utility and is:

$$\begin{aligned} U_j(x_j) &= U_j^{EXP}(x_j) + U_j^{MAT}(x_j) \\ &= \{B_j(x_j) - C(x_j)\} + \{\alpha_j I(x_j) - \gamma_j D(x_j)\}, \quad j = 1, \dots, n \end{aligned} \quad [7]$$

The voting decision is based on:

$$\begin{aligned} B_j(x_j^*) &= B_j(x_j^o) = 0 \\ C_j(x_j^*) &> 0, \quad C_j(x_j^o) = 0 \\ I_j(x_j^*) &> 0, \quad I_j(x_j^o) = 0. \end{aligned} \quad [8]$$

The individual may feel loss of expressive utility from not having voted if not voting is inconsistent with a chosen identity of a social responsible person. There may also be loss of expressive utility from communicating how he or she voted in the course of seeking approval from others. We therefore also have to account for:

$$D_j(x_j^*) \geq 0, \quad D_j(x_j^o) \geq 0. \quad [8']$$

The individual votes if:

$$\alpha_j I(x_j^*) > C(x_j^*) + \gamma_j [D(x_j^*) + D(x_j^o)], \quad j = 1, \dots, n. \quad [9]$$

If we disregard loss of expressive utility from not having voted and loss of expressive utility associated with communicating that the individual has voted for generous redistribution – that is, loss of expressive utility from communicating that the individual has voted expressively – the individual votes if simply

$$\alpha_j I(x_j^*) > C(x_j^*) \quad j = 1, \dots, n. \quad [9']$$

3.3 Attributes and types of expressive behavior

Most generally, expressive behavior is defined as seeking expressive utility from confirmation of identity. Expressive behavior is also defined for absence of interdependent utility; the utility of others does not appear in the utility functions [4], [5], or [7]. We also need to distinguish types of expressive behavior.

- (1) *Behavior is expressive if material utility alone is insufficient to justify a decision.*
- (2) *Behavior is insignificantly expressive if material utility alone would justify a decision.*
- (3) *Behavior is deceptive-expressive if the decision is contingent on the individual not being decisive or the decision being inconsequential in determining outcomes that affect the individual's material utility.*

From (1), behavior is expressive when:

$$U_j(x_j^*) = U_j^{EXP}(x_j^*) + U_j^{MAT}(x_j^*) > 0 \quad j = 1, \dots, n$$

$$U_j^{MAT}(x_j^*) = B_j(x_j^*) - C_j(x_j^*) < 0, \quad U_j^{EXP}(x_j^*) \alpha_j I_j(x_j^*) - \gamma_j D_j(x_j^*) > 0. [10]$$

The decision to vote is described by [10]. In an example involving a consumption decision, people from high-income families can choose to identify with low-income people by buying and wearing frayed clothing. When the price of new clothing becomes affordable to all but the poorest of poor, low-income people wear non-frayed clothing and high-income people buy and wear frayed clothing. Because of additional material cost because of the need for the strategically placed holes and tears, expressive utility is required to warrant the behavior, indicating a case of [10].

Behavior is insignificantly expressive as defined in (2) when a decision x_j^* provides positive expressive utility but

$$B(x_j^*) - C(x_j^*) > 0 \quad . \quad [11]$$

For example, a person may enjoy reading but may also benefit expressively from the books that he or she reads. Or, a person may purchase an environmentally beneficial vehicle without the expressive component of utility. In these cases, although expressive utility is present, expressive utility is insignificant in not being necessary for the decision to be made. I shall not further consider such cases.

For expressive behavior as defined in (3), an individual is not decisive for outcomes that affect his or her material utility. Because behavior does not affect material utility [5], the individual can proceed to maximize expressive utility [4]. My focus will be on such deceptive expressive behavior facilitated by the individual's decisions being inconsequential for the individual's material utility.

4. Expressive rhetoric

Expressive rhetoric is the first of the further forms of deceptive expressive behavior that I wish to describe. Rather than adding the qualification "deceptive" to describe behavior, I shall now refer to the deceptive behavior described in (3) as simply expressive. The behavior described in the expressive-voting example in table 1 is deceptive because individuals would, if they could, veto the generous policy for which they voted. Expressive rhetoric parallels expressive voting up to a point that I shall indicate. Expressive rhetoric provides expressive utility by confirming identity and is deceptive when people who are aware that their rhetoric is inconsequential for their material utility proclaim the merits of equality in income distribution and wealth but are not generous in their own personal behavior. In geopolitical contexts, expressive rhetoric can take the form of platitudes with which no reasonable person would disagree, such as "conflict is undesirable" and "compromise through good-will should

always be sought”. In now considering expressive rhetoric, I shall use an example from the geopolitical context.¹⁰

4.1 Self-defense

Expressive rhetoric can deny own right to self-defense. The denial can begin with a “narrative” that defines a person’s own high-income society with western values as “strong” and terrorists as “weak” because the terrorists are from non-western societies. The rhetoric can take the form:

“When one side is strong and the other side is weak, the strong should be conciliatory and negotiate generously to give the weak what they want”.

The expressive content is in the continuation, implicit or explicit:

“I would be conciliatory and generous if I were strong and confronted the weak”.

The expressive rhetoric parallels support through expressive voting for policies that reduce inequality by requiring high-income people (the strong) to be generously accommodating by sharing income and wealth with low-income people (the weak).

The “weak” can of course be the aggressors. Jack Hirshleifer (1991) described a “paradox of power” that arises because the “weak” can have a comparative advantage in contestability rather than in productive pursuits. When contestability is not benign, the “weak” can have a comparative advantage in inflicting harm.

A democratic civil society wishes to avoid – and where initiated to end – conflict. Democracies do not initiate war and are in general quick to seek an end to conflict if hostilities have begun.¹¹

¹⁰ Expressive rhetoric differs from the “cheap talk” of game theory whereby proclamations of intentions are made without means of commitment. Cheap talk can be beneficial in coordinating mutually beneficial outcomes, as in weakest-link public-good games (see Hillman, 2009, p. 162).

¹¹ Autocrats initiate war because the benefits are personal and the costs are imposed on the population at large (see Hillman 2009, chapter 3).

Adversary groups can however have supreme-value ideologies. The supreme values define lexicographic preferences that allow no compromise in the objectives that a group seeks (Bernholz, 1993). The supreme-value objective may be submission of all people to a particular ideology or belief system.

Ending conflict through compromise is impossible when adversaries have supreme values (Bernholz, 2004; Hillman, 2007). Expressive rhetoric that calls for compromise and conciliation is nonetheless a source of expressive utility.¹²

The expressive rhetoric can proclaim:

“All people are reasonable: we should not take the supreme values at face value and we should attempt to resolve differences”.

To compare utility from alternative rhetoric, we denote conciliatory rhetoric that provides expressive utility by x_j^* . If x_j^* would result in the implementation of the declared policies of conciliation, the rhetoric would be consequential and personal material utility would be affected. Otherwise, as in expressive voting, the expressive rhetoric is inconsequential because the rhetoric does not affect own material utility.

Utility associated with the expressive rhetoric x_j^* is:

$$U_j(x_j^*) = \delta_j[B_j(x_j^*) - C(x_j^*)] + [\alpha_j I(x_j^*) - \gamma_j D(x_j^*)], \quad j = 1, \dots, n. \quad [12]$$

When $\delta_j = 0$, the rhetoric x_j^* is inconsequential for material utility and only affects expressive utility:

$$U_j^{EXP}(x_j^*/inconsequential) = \alpha_j I(x_j^*) - \gamma_j D(x_j^*) > 0 \quad . \quad [13]$$

When $\delta_j = 1$, the rhetoric x_j^* is consequential in affecting material utility.

¹² See for example Frey (2004) on proposals for the use of “carrots and sticks” in the face of terror and the commentary by Inbar (2006), and the interchange between Cowen (2004) and Plaut (2004).

If the rhetoric x_j^* is consequential and disallows policies of self-defense that are necessary for personal safety, the loss of material utility can exceed the expressive utility from the rhetoric and result in:

$$U_j(x_j^* / consequential) = [B_j(x_j^*) - C(x_j^*)] + [\alpha_j I(x_j^*) - \gamma_j D(x_j^*)] < 0. \quad [14]$$

There are moral dilemmas when personal safety is sought in the face of terror. The moral dilemmas arise because of difficulties in distinguishing persons with intentions of inflicting harm from others who have no intention of engaging in terror (Franck, Hillman, and Krausz, 2005). With awareness of the moral dilemmas, we denote by x_j^o the proposal that:

“Effective preemptive measures should be taken to provide personal safety”.

There is no expressive utility from x_j^o because choosing x_j^o resolves the moral dilemma in favor of personal safety. Therefore, independently of whether x_j^o consequential or inconsequential in influencing policy decisions:

$$U_j^{EXP}(x_j^o) = \alpha_j I(x_j^o) - \gamma_j D(x_j^o) = 0 \quad . \quad [15]$$

However, if consequential, x_j^o provides personal safety, indicated by:

$$U_j^{MAT}(x_j^o / consequential) = B_j(x_j^o) - C(x_j^o) > 0. \quad [16]$$

The utility-maximizing choice between x_j^* and x_j^o is determined according to:

$$U_j^{MAT}(x_j^o / consequential) > U_j^{EXP}(x_j^* / consequential) \quad [17]$$

$$0 = U_j^{MAT}(x_j^o / inconsequential) < U_j^{EXP}(x_j^* / inconsequential). \quad [18]$$

The choice is x_j^o if the rhetoric is consequential (affects material utility). If the proposal x_j^o is inconsequential (does not affect material utility), the choice is the expressive rhetoric x_j^* . The chosen rhetoric x_j^* proclaims the merit of policies that are contrary to the individual's self-interest of seeking personal safety. Through the rhetoric of

declaring willingness to forego personal safety to avoid the moral dilemmas in self-defense, utility is however maximized with maximal expressive utility.

4.2 Immigration and the welfare state

Because the behavior is inconsequential, expressive rhetoric can encompass policy contradictions. Adverse selection may result in attraction of immigrants to a welfare state in order to benefit from the availability of publicly financed income transfers.¹³ Expressive rhetoric provides expressive utility:

“Our society is fortunate and we should be generous in allowing those who have been less fortunate to join us”.

The rhetoric is inconsequential if there is no influence on policy and thereby on material utility. The same individual may also vote expressively in favor of permitting entry of unproductive immigrants into the welfare state. Expressive generosity is then combined with inconsequential rhetoric and the non-decisiveness of expressive voting. If the individual were decisive in either voting or through the persuasion of rhetoric, behavior might change. The loss of material utility because the tax burden of financing income transfers to immigrants might lead to the foregoing of expressive utility.

A generous welfare state and entry of unproductive immigrants are inconsistent with the social insurance contract that is the motive for the welfare state. Expressive behavior is however not impeded by policy contradictions. Because the individual is inconsequential, as is indeed also a small political party, expressive utility can be obtained by simultaneously supporting a generous welfare state and also favoring a generous open immigration policy, in particular for refugees. Again, the disregard of information allows expressive utility

¹³ See Nannestad (2007). Nannestad (2004) focuses on Denmark. Nannestad (2009) speculates on how an expressive interpretation can be constructed for the sustained unproductiveness of immigrants in welfare states.

to be sustained. Expressive declines when the contradiction (see Sinn, 1997) between the viability of the social insurance contract and unproductive immigrants is pointed out. Expressive utility further declines when the evidence is confronted that, given the nature of the regimes in most low-income countries (Hillman, 2004; Borooraah and Paldam, 2007), almost any resident of these countries who was not born to a family of the political elites qualifies as a refugee seeking asylum from avarice and repression.

4.3 Political correctness and expressive utility

We now can propose a definition of political correctness:

By restricting information, political correctness protects expressive utility.

The protection of expressive utility is through the pronouncement:

You are not allowed to say that.

The implicit continuation is:

You are not allowed to say that even if what you say may be true because you diminish my expressive utility.

If expressive utility requires the counterfactual premise that the adversary does not have supreme values, expressive utility-maximization disallows reference to the supreme values, or indeed disallows asking the question whether there are supreme values. Limitations of political correctness likewise protect expressive utility when there may be moral hazard among beneficiaries of income transfers from governments or adverse selection when immigrants choose to arrive in welfare states rather than locate in jurisdictions that require personal self-reliance. Using political correctness to disallow information that diminishes expressive utility is rational when rhetoric is inconsequential for personal material utility.

4.4 The rhetoric of soft power

Soft power (Nye, 2005) is a concept in international relations proposing that gentle persuasion can end adversarial conflict and

lead to conciliation by appeal to the rationality of avoiding conflict. The proscription of soft power is a case of expressive rhetoric. The expressive utility is obtained by proclaiming the effectiveness of soft power and advocating unilateral non-adversarial methods of conflict resolution, and thereby confirming own pleasing identity as opposing all violence.

4.5 Expressive behavior and the “useful-idiots” hypothesis

Before the fall of the Soviet Union, there was support in the West for unilateral disarmament and soft power. The advocates of unilateral disarmament and soft power were obtaining expressive utility by confirming their peace-loving identity. Information about harmful intentions of the communist rulers was politically incorrect in the social circles of the supporters of soft power. The expressive rhetoric in support of soft power was of the form:

“Other people are fundamentally nice, as I am nice, and we can, by talking to one another, find common ground for ending conflict”.

Acknowledging the supreme values of communism would have reduced expressive utility.

Expressive behavior is an alternative to the “useful-idiots” hypothesis. Expressive behavior does not view people as “idiots” but as self-interestedly maximizing utility in circumstances in which personal behavior is inconsequential for personal material utility and all utility is therefore obtained in expressive form.¹⁴

4.6 Soft power proposed for others

Expressive rhetoric may be directed at others. If threatened *and if their decisions were consequential*, the advocates of soft power would

¹⁴ The term “useful idiots” has origins in the description by Soviet leaders of parts of Western populations that supported Soviet objectives. See also Norwood (2009) on support for national socialist ideology in prestigious U.S. universities in the 1930s.

forgo the expressive utility from expressive rhetoric and seek the material utility of personal safety. The confirmation of own conciliatory identity through expressive rhetoric in the face of threats *that others face* is always inconsequential for personal material utility. Expressive voters adhere to expressive positions unless or until decisiveness makes their decision consequential in affecting their own material utility. The prospect of a decision being personally consequential is not present to set bounds on the expressive rhetoric of soft power directed at others.

Self-defense is a basic instinct for humans and indeed all animals or sentient beings. People to whom others deny the right to self-defense are placed in unnatural circumstances where they are informed that they will not be permitted to resist those who would seek to do them harm. The externality is the feeling of self-worth of those denied the right of self-defense is diminished. The externality is not internalized because the objective of the rhetoric is expressive utility for oneself.

4.7 Expressive media

Expressive rhetoric of individuals has in general only a limited audience. The audience is however greater for those for whom the media chooses to publicize expressive rhetoric. Expressive behavior by the media is inconsistent with providing reliable information that people can use when making decisions about personal wealth. When specialization is not to financial reporting, expressive media can profit by catering to identity-confirming interpretations and perspectives of expressive populations. The media can expressively proscribe soft power for populations that confront life-threatening existential circumstances. When populations to whom the media cater obtain expressive utility through expressive support for one side in a conflict, the media can provide substantiation of expressive perceptions. The media can also enhance expressive utility by selective prejudicial reporting. True information that contradicts the

predispositions of expressive listeners and readers would detract from their expressive utility. The media can increase expressive utility by selectively ignoring true information, and by changing information to achieve consistency with the requisites of the expressive utility of readers and listeners.¹⁵

5. Expressive utility with conflicting identities

I have this far regarded the identity that is self-pleasing as the same as the identity that is pleasing to others. However, confirming a self-pleasing identity and an identity sought for social or peer approval can be contradictory objectives. We can make the distinction by denoting by S_j the identity sought by individual j for approval from others and expanding expressive utility to

$$U_j^{EXP}(x_j) = \alpha_j I_j(x_j) + \beta_j S_j(x_j) - \gamma_j D_j(x_j) \geq 0, \quad j = 1, \dots, n \quad [19]$$

where

$$\alpha_j \geq 0, \beta_j \geq 0, \gamma_j \geq 0, \quad j = 1, \dots, n.$$

The individual now confronts a choice between expressive utility from confirming the identity that would be chosen without regard for approval from others and expressive utility from confirming the identity that will provide social or peer approval. Adding material utility to [19] results in

$$U_j(x_j) = B_j(x_j) - C_j(x_j) + \alpha_j I_j(x_j) + \beta_j S_j(x_j) - \gamma_j D_j(x_j) \geq 0, \quad j = 1, \dots, n \quad [20]$$

When x_j is continuous and $x_j^* > 0$ is chosen, the decision that maximizes [20] is made according to:¹⁶

¹⁵ Mullainathan and Shleifer (2005) describe manipulation of reporting of news. Iyengar and Hahn (2009) provide experimental evidence from the U.S. indicating matching of personal preferences for relying on alternative media with media ideology.

¹⁶ I set aside the technicalities of corner solutions.

$$\left(B_j'(x_j^*) + \alpha_j I'(x_j^*)\right) = \left(C_j'(x_j^*) + \gamma_j D_j'(x_j^*)\right), \quad j = 1, \dots, n. \quad [21]$$

The decision x_i^* from [21] can result in an outcome in which:

$$\alpha_j I_j(x_j^*) < 0, \quad \beta_j S_j(x_j^*) > 0. \quad [22]$$

Behavior is then indicated for which expressive utility from confirming own identity has been compromised by satisfying requisites of an identity that provides approval from others. We can consider some examples characterized by [22].

5.1 *The economist as preacher*

George Stigler (1982) viewed economists as for the most part preachers. He proposed that “the main lesson that I draw from our experience as preachers is that we are *well received* in the measure that we preach what the society wants to hear”.¹⁷ Stigler was referring to the expressive utility from approval from others. The rhetoric that is a requisite of being well-received by others can, of course, differ from on declarations and also dispositions when peer approval is not sought.

5.2 *The rhetoric of self-blame*

In the aftermath of the attacks on the United States on September 11 2001, various U.S. commentators joined European commentators and others outside of the U.S. in rhetoric declaring that the United States had brought the attack upon itself.¹⁸ The rhetoric of self-blame was of the form:

“We deserve what others do to us because we have been condescending in supposing the primacy of our culture”.

Such rhetoric was conjoined with the familiar:

¹⁷ Stigler (1982, p. 13)

¹⁸ For example, see Miller (2008), who reviews the themes of post 9/11 U.S. novelists.

“The U.S. is strong and they are weak and hence the U.S. should have been more respectful to them”.

The expressive-behavior hypothesis in particular predicts this rhetoric from persons whose peer group has foreign components, which includes academics and journalists.

The expressive-behavior hypothesis predicts also quests for expressive utility by confirming requisites of group identity while not wishing the outcomes proclaimed in rhetoric to occur. For example, a person could understand that attacks, actual or preempted, on the populations of their countries were acts of malice, and that soft power would not protect against the malice. The rhetoric of soft power is nonetheless chosen because of the expressive utility in resisting armed measures. The expressive rhetoric is chosen because again an individual’s rhetoric is inconsequential for actual outcomes.

5.3 Unpopularity of the U.S.

The U.S. was sufficiently unpopular in Europe and elsewhere during the presidency of George W. Bush for the unpopularity to be studied (Judt and Lacorne, 2005; Katzenstein and Keohane, 2007). A panel of political scientists in the U.S. that enquired into the reasons for the dislike (Katzenstein, Legro, and others with dissent by Krasner and Nau, 2009) concluded that there had been a decline in U.S. political “standing”, defined as “the everyday currency of America’s existence in the world”. Political standing was similar in international relations to long-term political capital or to goodwill in accounting. The U.S. political scientists viewed “standing” as having “intrinsic value, including in the self-understanding of Americans, even when it has no readily observable behavioral implications”. Having no standing when standing has *no readily observable behavioral implications* suggests prejudicial dislike of the U.S. on account of nothing that was ever done. Under President George W. Bush, the U.S., it would seem, had focused on own expressive utility I_j and not on expressive utility S_j that could have been obtained by confirming an identity that

was pleasing to many Europeans and others. The subsequent U.S. president, it was suggested,¹⁹ was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize some few months into his presidency for expressive rhetoric that increased U.S. “standing” by increasing approval from others.

5.4 Material benefits and expressive loss

Bruno Frey (2003) described the decision whether to write and then revise papers only to please external reviewers. Although an author feels that the paper is fine, accepting idiosyncratic dictates of reviewers as “improvements” can be a requisite for a favorable publication decision.²⁰ Peer approval or being “well-received” through demonstration of success in publishing provides expressive utility S_j but at the loss of expressive utility I_j . Pleasing others can in this case also be consequential through material benefits. Acceptance of the paper could affect income or influence a tenure decision. Insisting on expressive utility through own self-pleasing identity rather than seeking approval from others can also be consequential in resulting in being passed over when conference invitations are issued and when awards of merit are made.²¹

In issues of geopolitics, material benefit may require achieving peer-group approval by participation in self-defamation. Through the self-defamation, the individual confirms the identity consistent with prejudicial principles of the group from whom approval is sought.

¹⁹ On this view, set out by a previous winner of the Nobel peace prize, see for example <http://www.krakowpost.com/article/1623>.

²⁰ Timur Kuran (1995) has distinguished between “private truth” and “public lies”. In his terminology, the private truth is that “the paper is fine as it is” and the public lie in these circumstances is that “the paper has been improved by the referees’ comments”. Often, of course, the comments of reviewers often do improve a paper and without the improvements proposed by reviewers many a paper is not publishable.

²¹ See Yan Chen and Sherry Xin Li (2009) on benefits obtained through empathy and preferential treatment because of common group identity.

The individual's participation in self-defamation does not affect the group's prejudicial position but can provide material benefit through group approval. For example, the rhetoric may again be of self-blame. The gain may be, for example, material benefit from contracts or employment in the United Nations. In such cases utility maximizing choice x_j^* has resulted in:

$$\alpha_j I_j(x_j^*) + \beta_j S_j(x_j^*) + U_j^{MAT}(x_j^*) > 0, \quad I_j(x_j^*) < 0 . \quad [23]$$

The loss of expressive utility I_j in [23] occurs because x_j^* compromises own identity that would be chosen to be confirmed if there were not expressive utility from peer approval. Expressive utility from peer approval and material benefits in [23] compensate for the loss of expressive utility due to compromise of own identity.

6. Expressive generosity

For some people (in particular students, to whom I shall return), the deception of expressively voting for generosity while not behaving generously, or of expressively declaring the virtue of generosity while not actually personally giving, may not provide expressive utility. Rather, the act of actual giving may be required for expressive utility. Expressive utility is predicated only on own utility. With interdependent utility absent, we have the definition that:

Expressive generosity describes giving only for the purpose of obtaining expressive utility for oneself.

The behavior of expressive generosity thus confirms generous identity as a person who gives – and who will be able truthfully to report having given. The deception in this case is that the donor does not base giving on consequences for the recipient but only on consequences for own utility.²²

²² In the final section I shall consider the consequences when altruism accompanies expressive generosity.

Where do we find evidence of expressive generosity? The following section offers an interpretation of the evidence from experiments. Expressive generosity is also revealed in policies and “natural experiments” regarding personal behavior.

For policies, we can, for example, consider foreign aid. The evidence is that aid does not promote growth and does not help the poor in low-income countries (Easterly, 2001; Doucouliagos and Paldam, 2008). Aid is appropriated for personal benefit by the political classes (Hillman, 2004). There is also a hostage problem: people are kept poor so that further aid that can be appropriated will continue (Easterly, 2001; Hillman, 2002). The political classes have furthermore no interest in economic growth because higher incomes for the general population would increase demands for broad political participation and thereupon for transparency and accountability in government (Welzman, 2009). Rent-seeking incentives have made aid detrimental for recipient populations (Svensson, 2000). The aid would not persist if the giving of aid involved consideration of the utility of the recipient. The persistence of the ineffective and indeed disadvantageous aid indicates that the motive for the aid is expressive utility for donors.²³

The utility of recipients can thus decline but expressive donors nonetheless give to benefit from expressive utility through expressive generosity. A natural experiment illustrates the phenomenon. Two high-income visitors to a low-income country encounter a school-age child who is offering trinkets for sale at a time of day when the child confirms that she should (and could) be in school. One traveler points out that the child’s best interest is that she be in school and that the act of purchasing trinkets will discourage the child’s parents from sending her to school. The other traveler withdraws from the purchase but then later is seen furtively taking the opportunity to

²³ Where aid is predicated on a reciprocal benefit, there is no presumption of generosity (Younas, 2008).

buy trinkets from the child. The trinkets bring the buyer no material utility and are in due course discarded. The purchase of the trinkets provides expressive utility by confirming generous identity. The buyer did not make a decision based on outcomes for the child. Consistently with our model of expressive utility, only own expressive utility mattered. The example here has described parents who exploit children. In another example, parents obtain expressive utility by overfeeding children.

7. Expressive behavior in experiments

If expressive behavior, including expressive generosity, is widespread, evidence of the behavior should be revealed in experiments. We now look at experiments. We begin with experiments directed at expressive voting and then consider behavior in other types of experiments.

7.1 Experiments on expressive voting

In real-life voting, individual voters are not decisive.²⁴ In experiments voters can however be informed that they will be decisive with particular probabilities. Giving people the opportunity to be decisive allows a test of the expressive-voting hypothesis. Deceptive expressive voters and expressively generous voters differ in behavior when a vote is decisive. An expressive voter obtains expressive utility through the pretense of wishing to give and will veto giving if decisive.

²⁴ Voters may falsely believe that they are decisive. Sobel and Wagner (2004) attributed greater redistribution of income in larger U.S. states to a smaller likelihood that an individual voter will be decisive. The probability of being a decisive voter is however objectively negligible when the size of the electorate reaches even that of the least populated U.S. state. It appears that the size of the electorate influenced inaccurate subjective perceptions of the probability of being decisive.

Expressively generous voters want to give and if decisive will vote to give, subject to not having to give too much.

Carter and Guerette (1992) tested the expressive-voting hypothesis by asking students from economics and accounting classes at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester in Massachusetts to choose between keeping \$6 or \$9 for themselves (depending on the experiments) and forgoing the money in return for \$2 donated to charity. The decision was as if made by majority voting and the students were told the probability of their being decisive. The prediction of the deceptive expressive-voting hypothesis is that the likelihood of the students voting to give their money to charity increased as the probability of being decisive decreased. There was, however, only “weak support” for the deceptive expressive-voting hypothesis. Rather, students voted for giving money to charity when decisive. The students were expressing their identity of being generous through actually giving. Consistently with the premise of expressively generous behavior, the students did not know – or indeed did not seem to care – to whom they were giving charity. The behavior was not based on interdependent utilities between the students and possible beneficiaries of their generosity. Preeminent in determining behavior was the students’ confirmation of a generous identity. In conversations with friends and family, there would have been loss of expressive utility in describing the experiment and reporting that “I took the money where possible for myself and did not care about giving to others”.²⁵

²⁵ Carter and Guerette noted that true charitable intentions would have had a “confounding” effect on the results of their experiments. The students could, of course, have expressed their generous nature by taking the smaller sums offered and donating more than \$2 to charity. Carter and Guerette noted that this was a rational decision by students. However, they viewed the claim of giving charity from the larger personal sum as only a means of “rationalizing” a vote for personal money.

In another experiment, Tyran (2004) used as subjects students from the universities of St Gallen in Switzerland and Innsbruck in Austria. Again, the students were given a sum of money and told that they had different known probabilities of being decisive in a majority vote on the choice between keeping the money and giving the money to charity. The students were also rewarded for correctly predicting the outcome of the majority vote. In a first experiment, all students donated to charity if there was a majority vote in favor of donating without regard for how a student had personally voted. In a second experiment, if a majority favored giving to charity, students could keep their money for themselves if they had personally voted against donating. A student who believed that a majority would vote in favor of charity incurred no material loss from voting for charity in the first experiment; however not so in the second experiment, in which a vote against giving charity would allow students to keep the money for themselves. The deceptive expressive voting hypothesis predicts that students will vote in favor of giving to charity in the first experiment but not in the second.²⁶ There was however no significant difference between behavior in the two experiments.²⁷ The deceptive expressive-voting hypothesis was therefore rejected. Expressive generosity explains the students' behavior. In both types of experiment, the

²⁶ There was an attempt to eliminate ethics from the students' decisions by refraining from informing the students about the ethical implications of their decisions. "...in the wording of the instructions as well as in our behavior during the experiment we avoided to give subjects the impression that they are somehow morally obliged to donate their endowment to the charity. Rather, we tried to appear as neutral as possible" (p. 1652). We can surmise that the students understood that ethics was involved in the choice between taking money for themselves and giving to others.

²⁷ The subjects were less generous overall than the students from the College of the Holy Cross: 46% always voted not to give and 40% behaved as in the expressive voting models by changing behavior in response to the probability of being decisive. The remaining 14% always voted to give.

students voted to confirm a generous identity by giving money to charity, which they could do when giving had majority support.²⁸

We can surmise that the sums of money in the experiments were too small to warrant the students foregoing expressive utility by not giving.²⁹ In an experiment reported by Fischer (1996), students who were offered the possibility of outcomes that allowed them to keep \$200 for themselves responded to the probability of being decisive as predicted by the deceptive expressive-voting hypothesis. When the likelihood of being decisive was high, the expected material gain was sufficiently great to override expressive utility from expressive generosity.³⁰

*7.2 Other experiments*³¹

We expect to find expressive behavior in expressive-voting experiments, even if expressive generosity rather than deceptive expressive voting. What of other experiments?

Although in the single-interaction prisoners' dilemma it is rational behavior not to cooperate, often in experiments students

²⁸ Tyran interpreted his experiments as revealing "bandwagon effects", meaning that students conformed in their voting decisions to how they expected others to vote ("Just as it may be more fun to cheer for a team if others cheer too, it may be more rewarding to vote for a morally worthy cause if others are expected to do so, too"). There is of course a relation between bandwagon effects and being decisive: students who conform by voting the same way as they expect others to vote do not anticipate being a decisive voter.

²⁹ In Tyran's experiments, the students' stake was the equivalent of \$6 plus \$3 for predicting the vote of the majority, similar to the sums in the Holy Cross experiments.

³⁰ Fischer also reported that voting for charity increased when voting was observed by others, indicating the presence of the social approval motive.

³¹ The experimental evidence that is the basis for the remainder of this section is summarized in Hillman (2009, chapter 7.3, Social justice without government).

achieve the efficient cooperative outcome. Cooperation is predicted if the payoffs perceived by the students include expressive utility from confirmation of cooperative identity. In the public good game, which is a variation on a theme of the prisoners' dilemma, free riding to attempt to exploit the kindness of others is inconsistent with confirming a generous identity.

In the trust game, expressive behavior of the donor can confirm the identity of being a trusting person and the expressive behavior of the recipient can confirm the identity of being a trustworthy person. In the predicted Nash equilibrium based on material gain alone, no money is transferred. Expressive utility explains why money is transferred and also returned.³²

In ultimatum games, there can be affront when recipients perceive unfairness. The affront is expressed in rejection of offers when the material utility lost in rejecting an offer is sufficiently low. Recipients who feel that they have been treated unfairly are reacting to the perception that the donor is not a generous person. Rejection of offers perceived as unfair confirms the identity that "I am a reasonable person provided others are reasonable in their behavior to me". Expressive utility also explains seemingly anomalous outcomes in which very high offers in ultimatum games are rejected (see for example Chen and Tang, 2009). The high offers are regarded as condescending and the intended recipient would lose expressive utility if the "excessively" generous offer of the donor were accepted.

The dictatorship game is the purest test of expressive generosity because people give to confirm their generous nature. They do not know to whom they are giving and may well be giving to people who are better off than themselves. The purpose of giving is therefore not

³² In a class in Europe when the trust game was being explained, a student from an East Asian country could not comprehend why she should be expected to return any money – from which we impute a utility function with no expressive component of utility. Of course, she was a graduate student in economics, which is a distinction to which I shall presently turn.

to benefit others but to obtain expressive utility for oneself. Expressive utility from peer group approval is indicated by the evidence (Cason and Mui, 1997) that donors are more generous in proposals for giving when the decision is made collectively.³³

7.3 Economics students

Economics students (and economists) often differ systematically in behavior from others.³⁴ The behavior of economics students is in general consistent an identity of being rational, competitive, and profit-seeking. Frank and Schulze (2000) ask whether studying economics makes people “corrupt”: the experimental evidence is that knowledge of economics is correlated with being more self-interested. When economics students are introduced to the prisoners’ dilemma, they not only learn the concepts of dominant strategy and Nash equilibrium; they are also told that payoffs as material rewards are the sole source of utility. The inclination to behave expressively is taken out of their personal calculations. Non-economics students tend to indicate greater awareness of expressive utility and seek to confirm an identity of being generous and cooperative. The non-economics students may continue to cooperate in a repeated prisoners’ dilemma when others do not, because of the expressive utility from confirming how much nicer they are than the people who do not cooperate. Differences in behavior between economics and non-economics students may therefore be less explained by whether there has been self-selection in choosing to study economics than by economics students behaving to confirm an identity that stems from exposure to models based on material utility with no expressive

³³ There are also cases in dictatorship games where, when the decision is completely anonymous including with respect to the researcher overseeing the experiment, some students give nothing. Such an outcome indicates rationality based on material utility alone.

³⁴ For an overview of the literature comparing behavior of economists and non-economists, see Kirchgässner (2005).

content of utility, while non-economics students care more about expressive utility.

7.4 Gender differences

There are also gender differences in behavior in experiments (Eckel, 2008; Eckel and Grossman, 2008). Croson and Gneezy (2009) summarize the evidence on gender as indicating that men and women often behave differently but there are “exceptions to the rule” for “managers and professional populations”. Men and women have of course similar identities and a similar material focus on utility in professional roles and career objectives. Identities differ by gender when there is not a common material focus. Experimental outcomes in dictatorship games in particular reveal substantive gender-related differences in behavior. Men tend to be more sensitive than women to material cost when deciding whether or how much to give to others. Men thereby confirm a calculating identity responsive to material-utility loss. Women tend to confirm an identity indicating responsiveness to the needs of the recipient rather than the material cost of giving (Andreoni and Vesterlund, 2001). The experimental outcomes indicate that men tend to behave consistently with an identity of seekers of efficiency while women tend to seek more social justice and equality.³⁵

8. Deception

We began from expressive voting with deception and social costs present and have seen that deception and social costs can likewise be present when expressive behavior takes the form of expressive rhetoric or expressive generosity. How does deception in expressive behavior compare with other perspectives on deception in economics and politics?

³⁵ The same tendencies are revealed in voting behavior of men and women (Hillman, 2009, chapter 6).

George Akerlof (1989) described willful illusion in choice of bias in perception of information that trades off people's "desires to feel good about themselves" and reality. Tyler Cowen (2005) proposed that voters disregard information that is inconsistent with confirmation of self-image or that would imply that they had made incorrect decisions in the past; the self-deception includes the personal justification for making the effort to become informed about candidates' policies rather than being rationally ignorant and also belief in being the decisive voter. Bryan Caplan (2003, 2007) described self-deception in terms of preferences over beliefs and proposed that people believe what they want to believe by choosing the beliefs that give them highest utility, behavior that he called "rational irrationality".

In these cases, people delude themselves into *sustained* self-deception to maximize utility. Deceptive expressive behavior is knowingly conditional on not being decisive or on behavior being inconsequential.³⁶

9. Remedies

Expressive behavior allows us to understand a broad range of behavioral phenomena. The behavior even if deceptive is not a social problem if there are no social costs. People can pretend to be who wish to be and have the satisfaction provided by expressive utility. There are however problems when there are social costs. The social costs of expressive voting are policies supported by voters who would each individually veto the same policies if they were decisive. Expressive rhetoric can be an accompaniment of expressive voting or can take place independently of voting: the social costs are more subtle than expressive voting and can involve being demeaning of others who are not similarly expressive, or diminishing the self-worth of others by proposing soft power that in the same circumstances

³⁶ Cognitive dissonance (Akerlof and Dickens, 1973) therefore is also conditional.

and in particular if behavior were consequential one would not recommend for oneself. Expressive generosity can impose social costs because, as in all expressive behavior, the focus is on utility for oneself. When there are social costs, we seek remedies.

A society's institutions can be a remedy for internalizing social costs. There is disappointment when, after a majority of voters has expressively voted for an outcome that they do not want, elected representatives set out to implement the policies.³⁷ The disappointment is avoided when candidates and political parties are also expressive. Expressive voters then achieve their preferred outcome of obtaining expressive utility without incurring the personal material costs of the policies for which they voted. Before an election, the political party supported by the expressive majority makes expressive policy proclamations about, for example, the merits of generous sharing of income and wealth. After the election, the elected representatives are aware that proceeding to implement extensive redistribution will result in defeat in a future election by another political party that is credibly expressive in rhetoric and undertakes only the limited redistribution required for voters' expressive utility from expressive generosity.³⁸ Institutions that internalize social costs of expressive voting do not internalize the social costs of expressive rhetoric. Indeed, the expressive rhetoric is magnified because the rhetoric substitutes for the substance of policies to provide expressive utility.

³⁷ For example, after the 2008 U.S. presidential election, expressive voting with regard to universal health care became evident when intentions were announced for actual implementation.

³⁸ A political party such as "new Labor" in the United Kingdom thereby emerges that the middle class can feel comfortable in supporting and likewise the Labor Party in Australia and "social democratic" parties elsewhere. In Israel expressive voters of the upper-middle class were a mainstay of support for the Labor Party. In Greece, of two communist parties, one allows expressive voting by intellectuals.

Where institutions do not internalize social costs of expressive behavior, the usual remedies for social costs (see for example Hillman, 2009, chapter 5) do not appear to apply. Expressive individuals cannot be taxed or regulated. Coase negotiations are not applicable.

Expressive behavior can be changed by events that increase the expressive costs of being expressive.³⁹ For example, the end of communism diminished expressive utility from support for collective property and for assigning responsibilities to social planners and successful terror attacks diminish expressive utility from soft-power rhetoric.

There are solutions for children. When children uninhibitedly proclaim on being told a story or watching a movie that they are “Jack” or “Jill” or another hero or heroine, prompting by parents can lead the children to shed their expressive identities.

Such paternalistic remedies are difficult to apply to adults. Expressive people have no incentive to admit that they are being expressive. Crossing the bounds of political correctness and introducing facts deprives people expressive utility and can cause tensions and emotional responses. Nonetheless, pointing out to expressive people that they are being expressive may in many circumstances be the only recourse for remedy for social costs. However, we have no assurance that self-righteous pretensions of expressive behavior will not persist. People understandably resist giving up expressive utility.

10. Interdependent utility and expressive behavior

I have defined expressive behavior as devoid of incentives of interdependent utility. People maximize only their own utility without regard for consequences for others. A final question concerns the consequences when expressive behavior co-exists with altruism or malice. There is little change.

³⁹ These are the costs that were denoted by D_j in the utility function.

10.1 Expressive voting

A person may altruistically feel that his or her voting benefits society through support for democratic principles. The decision to vote is expressive because one individual's actions are inconsequential in preserving democracy. The decision for whom to vote is also expressive. Intent of malice is present if the decision for whom to vote is made to "punish" a candidate or political party.⁴⁰ Again, because an individual vote is inconsequential, voting to "punish" (or to protest) is expressive. Expressive voting with altruism or malice remains expressive.

9.2 Expressive rhetoric

The social costs of expressive rhetoric are unintended: people are but maximizing own utility. As with other cases of externalities, it may not matter whether the social costs of are unintended and intended; for example, it is inconsequential whether environmental damage is unintended or intended. When expressive rhetoric preaches soft power and denies the right of self-defense, absence and presence of malice are observationally equivalent.⁴¹

9.3 Expressive generosity

Altruism is a natural complement of expressive generosity.⁴² An expressive person can confirm generous identity by giving and at the

⁴⁰ See Glaser (2008), who describes voting to anger (or please) others.

⁴¹ If malice is known to motivate expressive behavior, we are led to seek the sources of the prejudicial behavior. See for example Glaeser (2005), who attributes the intent of malice to political manipulation.

⁴² Andreoni (1990) distinguished between "impure" and "pure" altruism in personal contributions to a public good. Altruism was "impure" when the source of utility was increased availability of the public good and "pure" when utility increased because of the act of giving independently of the availability of the public good. The utility from "pure altruism" can be expressive because the individual obtains utility from confirming identity as

same time obtain altruistic satisfaction through benefit to the recipient. Expressive generosity does not, however, require altruism and is consistent with harm to the recipient. Although harm is possible, malice has no apparent role in expressive generosity. The consequence of expressive generosity can moral hazard and diminished self-reliance of recipients, or aid appropriated by rulers and political elites. However, this was not the intention of the expressive donors, who through the act of giving sought only to increase their own expressive utility.

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