

A Theory of Choice Under Internal Conflict

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Abstract

In this paper we argue, following some psychological literature, that "preferences" are the outcome of the interplay of different, potentially conflicting motivations. We propose an axiomatic approach with two motivations, which we assume to be single-peaked over one and the same dimension. We first consider the case in which motivations are given and stable, but then introduce some motivation change. We show first of all that certain choice behaviour that appears to be inconsistent from the standard rational choice account may be explained in our framework as the outcome of conflicting motivations. Furthermore, if we impose some minimal rationality, we show that motivation change leads to less inconsistent choices and not to more inconsistencies as one may think. This means that it is only by choosing different actions that conflicts between two motivations can eventually be resolved and the definite and final preference for an action can be revealed.