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THE 'VIEW FROM ANYWHERE': NORMATIVE ECONOMICS WITH CONTEXT-DEPENDENT PREFERENCES

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The ‘View from *Manywhere*’: Normative Economics with Context-Dependent Preferences

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Abstract

We propose a methodology for normative economics in presence of context-dependent preferences. The key feature of our approach is to locate normative authority, not in the synoptic and third-person judgement of the social planner (‘view from nowhere’), nor in the first-person judgement of the individual (‘view from somewhere’), but in the *second-person* ability of the individual to confront conflicting judgements across contexts (‘view from *manywhere*’). We offer a precise definition of context-dependence and detail our own proposition. We formulate a normative criterion of self-determination and advance two complementary justifications, interpreting the view from *manywhere* either as an extension of Sugden’s opportunity criterion, or as an application of Sen’s positional views in his theory of justice.

Keywords. *normative economics — social planner — context-dependent preferences — second-person standpoint — behavioural public policy*

JEL codes. B41, D63, D90, I31

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1 Introduction

A central and recurrent empirical finding in behavioural economics is that individuals' preferences are context-dependent. Preferences may depend on some aspects of the choice environment, such as the order in which the options are available or the way the choice problem is formulated. A major challenge for normative economics is to determine whether such context-dependent preferences give evidence about individual welfare, or if they can be ignored and treated as normatively irrelevant. Throughout this article, we use the term 'welfare' in the economists' sense of preference satisfaction and avoid references to the philosophically disputed notion of 'well-being'.¹ We use the expression 'standard normative economics' to refer to the branch of normative economics that assumes that individual preferences are context-independent and internally consistent (transitive, reflexive and complete) — what Sugden (2018) labels as integrated preferences. By contrast, we use 'behavioural normative economics' to refer to the branch of normative economics that is based on the premise that preferences are not always integrated. The overall methodological problem of finding a normative approach that is consistent with the empirical findings of behavioural economics is labelled by McQuillin and Sugden (2012) as the 'reconciliation problem'.²

The aim of this article is to address the reconciliation problem by putting forward the individuals' *ability to confront* the possibly conflicting judgements they may have on what is constitutive of their welfare, rather than focusing on their actual judgement or on their counterfactual enlightened judgement on what constitutes their welfare. As an illustration, imagine the 'dessert problem'. You and your colleagues regularly go to the same restaurant for lunch. You know that the chef prepares very tasty desserts, but they are slightly oversized for you. You therefore face a recurrent choice problem. Should you order a dessert, knowing that it will give you a significant and immediate enjoyment but probably make you a bit sleepy in the afternoon? Your actual choice is very likely to depend on the context: whether some of your colleagues have already ordered a dessert, whether you are in a good or bad mood, whether the chef nicely displayed a dessert close to your table to arouse your appetite, etc. Since your preference for a dessert is context-dependent, it is not clear whether your actual choice constitutes a reliable evidence of what maximises your welfare (and therefore, whether it is the 'good' choice in such a situation). Suppose, in line with the common practice in standard normative economics, that your welfare as measured by the theoretician fundamentally depends on your *own judgement* about what constitutes your welfare.³ We can distinguish between three different approaches to define what your own judgement is.

- (i) It is your current judgement in a given choice situation, e.g. it is a rainy day, you have just got a paper rejected, and the dessert looks very nice on the counter, so you order it.

¹As a point of terminology, the expression 'what makes an individual *better off*' that will be used in this article should be understood in the sense of 'what contributes to increase the welfare of the individual'.

²Just as welfare economics constitutes the bulk of the literature in standard normative economics, behavioural welfare economics has a central place in behavioural normative economics, although there are also non-welfarist approaches. See Harrison (2019) and Lecouteux (2021) for overviews.

³We use the generic term 'theoretician' to name the actual economist, philosopher, ethical theorist, etc., who models the choice problem and who intends to offer a normative judgement. We use the feminine to refer to the theoretician and the masculine to refer to the individual who is modelled by the theoretician.

- (ii) It is the outcome of a kind of bargaining between your current self and what you imagine your future self will be this afternoon, weighing the pros and cons of both options, and whose result will very likely be context-dependent too.
- (iii) It is your counterfactual ‘enlightened’ judgement about the choice problem, i.e. the rational tradeoff between an immediate enjoyment and a later cost, the result of which being determined by your deeply held values and preferences for different aspects of your life.

The argument we develop in this article is that option (ii) offers the most satisfying approach to determine individual welfare. Option (i) gives primary importance to the individual’s current personal judgement, and thus takes the *first-person standpoint*. Option (iii) considers an objective or context-independent perspective on what individuals ought to do, and thus takes the *third-person standpoint*. The approach we promote takes, instead, the *second-person standpoint*: the characterisation of what individuals ought to do is the result of a fruitful confrontation of their different selves, who are all affected by the choice problem. Our aim in this article is to develop a methodological defence of this argument, and to provide a brief sketch of its formal characterisation.

The rest of the article is organised as follows. In Section 2 we generalise the intuition of the three alternative standpoints in the dessert problem (the first, second and third-person standpoints) and propose a typology of normative approaches to the reconciliation problem as (respectively) views from ‘somewhere’, ‘*manywhere*’, and ‘nowhere’. Section 3 introduces the second-person standpoint and the view from *manywhere*. We advance a normative criterion of self-determination, according to which one state of affairs is normatively preferred to another if individuals are aware of more factors that influence their behaviour. In Section 4 we offer two justifications for our normative approach inspired by Sugden’s opportunity criterion and Sen’s notion of ‘positional views’. Section 5 concludes by discussing some practical implications of our normative approach for behavioural public policies.

2 To Whom Should Normative Economics Be Addressed?

2.1 Which Standpoint?

An important — although often overlooked — question that must be addressed when defining what makes an individual better off is ‘*according to whom?*’. While behavioural normative economists usually consider that context-dependent preferences are normatively problematic, it is also because what counts as the context is the result of their *own* value judgements about what is relevant in the given choice problem. For example, we could imagine that an individual considers in the dessert problem that the location of the dessert is a relevant property of the choice problem. It is unclear why the theoretician should be entitled to impose her own normative judgement about what counts as a relevant property.

Most of the literature in behavioural normative economics considers that it is the role of the theoretician, as an external observer, to characterise the individual’s welfare function. When the theoretician does not imagine herself directly in such a position, she

usually addresses her recommendation to an abstract social planner according to the economist's usual jargon (Kahneman, Wakker, and Sarin 1997), to a non-less abstract 'choice architect' (Thaler and Sunstein 2009) or to an actual consultant advising her clients (Harrison and Ross 2018). In this approach individual welfare is defined from a third-person standpoint: it is the impersonal perspective of an external observer who benevolently thinks about what is good for individuals. Within this literature, individual welfare is typically located in the *true* or *purified* preferences of the individual, i.e. the preferences that would be revealed through counterfactual choices in a context-independent environment (Camerer et al. 2003; Thaler and Sunstein 2003, 2009; Bernheim and Rangel 2008; Bernheim 2016; among others).

Sugden (2004, 2013, 2018) criticises this approach by considering that the theoretician should refrain from making value judgements about individuals' preferences, such as giving more weight to the individual's counterfactual enlightened judgement. In his account, the adequate standpoint for making normative judgements is the individual himself: he is the only judge of what constitutes his welfare, not an external third party. According to the first-person standpoint, nothing requires that the individual ought to make enlightened choices. In that regard, context-dependent preferences are not a fundamental issue for normative economics. What matters here is not the content of one's preferences, as judged by an external party, but that social institutions are designed in a way that each individual has the ability to satisfy any preference he *might* have (Sugden 2004, 2018).

In a complementary way to these two approaches, we argue that (i) theoreticians should avoid making a value judgement about what is best for individuals, while (ii) recognising that context-dependent preferences might still be a normative issue, in particular if individuals are not aware that their behaviour is likely to be influenced by the context. We are sympathetic to Sugden's position that normative economics should be addressed to individuals rather than to the abstract social planner: what matters is not how individuals actually behave, but that they are able to satisfy their own preferences — or more abstractly, that they have the means to choose the kind of life they might desire. However, unlike Sugden who considers that the theoretician should only base welfare evaluation on individuals' revealed preferences, we recognise the possibility that individuals may consider some of their incoherent preferences as problematic, had they been aware of such an incoherence.

We advance that individuals should have the opportunity to avoid manipulation and the undue influence of factors that they are not aware of. This ability of critical self-reflection does not require individuals to form an enlightened judgement like the one of the idealistic inner rational agent (Infante, Lecouteux, and Sugden 2016). We refer to a much weaker condition that remains compatible with the actual cognitive capacities of psychological beings.⁴ In order to avoid paternalistic claims about which contexts and preferences are 'problematic', we argue that the role of the theoretician should not be to give to individuals what they would choose if they were enlightened, but to ensure that social institutions are designed in a way that individuals have the

⁴See Christman (2009) and Lecouteux (2022) for a detailed discussion. Such a notion of self-reflection might however still be too demanding for Sugden, who has a Humean view of individual psychology (Sugden 2020).

opportunity to form their own enlightened judgements. The adequate standpoint to form a normative judgement is the *second-person*, which we will define in Section 3.

As a matter of terminology, we will use the expression ‘view from nowhere’ — as in Sugden (2013), who borrowed the terms coined by Nagel (1986) — to designate the methodology of behavioural normative economics that consists in defining welfare from the third-person standpoint, i.e. the position of the theoretician.⁵ We will use the expression ‘view from somewhere’ to designate Sugden’s proposal that normative judgements ought to be made from the first-person standpoint, i.e. from the position of the individual himself embedded in a specific context (rather than his counterfactual enlightened judgement, as imagined by the theoretician).⁶ In contrast with both the third-person ‘view from nowhere’ — for which the theoretician defines what the enlightened counterfactual choice of individuals would be — and the first-person ‘view from somewhere’ — where normative judgements are expressed directly by individuals themselves — we label our approach as the ‘view from *anywhere*’.⁷

2.2 Defining the Context

Since context-dependent preferences are at the centre of behavioural normative economics, we first propose a precise definition of the ‘context’ in order to clarify the terms of the discussion. It is indeed noteworthy that the literature lacks a precise definition of the notion, mostly because of the risk of circular definitions — as e.g. the ‘irrelevant’ factors, without defining a clear criterion to identify the ‘relevant’ factors. We propose a definition in line with the casual use of the expression in behavioural economics as the ‘background’ of choice, that seems to be irrelevant from a normative perspective, while however still influencing to some extent the choice of boundedly rational individuals.

We consider an individual I who must choose an option x among the non-empty set of available alternatives X . Each option is described by a list of properties P , with \mathcal{P} the set of properties. Formally, each property $P \in \mathcal{P}$ is a function assigning to each option $x \in X$ a value $P(x)$ from some range. In the case of a binary property, the range is $\{0; 1\}$, where $P(x) = 1$ means that x has the property and $P(x) = 0$ means that x does not have the property. More generally, the range could be some interval of values, where $P(x)$ represents the degree to which x has the property (e.g. the distance between the option x and a reference point). Properties can either refer to intrinsic properties of the alternatives (e.g. the location of the dessert, its colour, its shape, its distance) or properties of the environment (e.g. social norms about how to behave in a restaurant). We will consider different types of properties in our analysis: (i) motivational properties

⁵Even though the theoretician is an actual person, who therefore expresses a view from ‘somewhere’, we use the term ‘nowhere’ for her case, since she is providing an assessment on a model from her position *as a modeller*. Social evaluations are thus made by an actor who is literally *outside* the society/model that is being evaluated, unless the theoretician explicitly includes her role as an observer in the model. From the perspective of the individuals in the model, the theoretician’s personal judgement on what matters in the society she models comes from ‘above’, i.e. from nowhere in the model.

⁶The expression ‘view from somewhere’ was, anecdotally, the title of a workshop held in September 2019 at the University of East Anglia in honour of Robert Sugden. The expression is also used in (presumably) unrelated literature such as in Wilson (2007) and Wallace (2019), where the authors share the same concern about the difficulty of making assessments from an external position.

⁷We give details in Section 4 on the choice of the neologism *anywhere*.

$P \in \mathcal{M}_I \subseteq \mathcal{P}$, (ii) known properties $P \in \mathcal{K}_I \subseteq \mathcal{P}$, and (iii) relevant properties $P \in \mathcal{R}_I \subseteq \mathcal{P}$. The distinction is the following: the motivational properties are the properties which influence the actual choice of the individual, the known properties are the properties of which the individual is aware (i.e. when considering the options, the individual can determine the value $P(x)$), and the relevant properties are the properties which are normatively-relevant for the individual (i.e. the properties that determine whether an option is ‘better’ than another for the individual).

The set of motivational, known, and relevant properties may overlap, and there is *a priori* no relation of inclusiveness between \mathcal{M}_I , \mathcal{K}_I , and \mathcal{R}_I . Imagine for instance the dessert problem discussed above. Several desserts are available and displayed on a buffet, all of them within sight of I , including a chocolate cake. The cake is presented in a blue plate, is of medium size, turns out to be sugar-free, and was voluntarily positioned slightly in front of the other desserts (because the restaurant owner realised that clients tend to pick more the desserts which were in front). We have several properties characterising the cake, which could be formalised as follows:

- $P_b(\text{Cake}) = 1$, meaning that the property ‘blue plate’ is satisfied
- $P_{sz}(\text{Cake}) = 0.5$, meaning the relative size of the cake, on a range of real numbers from 0 to 1, is in the middle
- $P_{sg}(\text{Cake}) = 0$, meaning that the property ‘sugar’ is not satisfied
- $P_\ell(\text{Cake}) = 1$, representing the relative location of the cake on the buffet, on a range of real numbers from 0 — in the back — to 1 — ahead of others

Suppose that $\mathcal{K}_I = \{P_b, P_{sz}\}$, $\mathcal{R}_I = \{P_{sz}, P_{sg}\}$, and $\mathcal{M}_I = \{P_{sz}, P_\ell\}$. The client is aware that the cake is displayed in a blue plate and is of medium size, although he did not realise that it was ahead of the other desserts and sugar-free. He considers in the current situation that only the size of the cake matters, but if he was aware that the cake was sugar-free, he would also consider this property as relevant. Lastly, the only factors that will indeed influence his actual choice are the size of the cake (which is a known and relevant property) as well as the relative position on the buffet (which is an unknown and irrelevant property). We have here a situation in which a property is relevant, motivational, and is known (the size of the cake), another which is also relevant, but neither motivational nor known (the sugar content), a property which is motivational, but neither known nor relevant (the relative position on the buffet), and another which is known, but neither relevant nor motivational (the colour of the plate).⁸

The sets \mathcal{M}_I , \mathcal{K}_I , and \mathcal{R}_I , are the *representation* by the theoretician of the choice problem faced by I . For simplicity, we assume that the theoretician correctly identifies the set \mathcal{M}_I , i.e. she knows precisely what are the properties which influence the choice of the individual. Our definition of the context is based on the premise that it refers to what *we*, theoreticians, consider as the ‘irrelevant’ properties of the choice environment (Bacharach 2006, p. 13). Formally, a *context property* is a property that is motivational but not relevant: $P \in \mathcal{C}_I = \mathcal{M}_I \setminus \mathcal{R}_I$. A context is any combination $C = (C_P)_{P \in \mathcal{C}_I}$ of

⁸We could complete this illustration by covering the other possible cases (e.g. motivational and known, but not relevant, such as the weather outside the restaurant, etc.).

values of the context properties. In the illustration above, there is only one property — the relative location on the buffet — that is motivational and not relevant, i.e. $\mathcal{C}_I = \{P_\ell\}$, and the context is defined as the set of values of relative location on the buffet of the different desserts. With those notations, we have context-dependent preferences when the set of contexts \mathcal{C}_I is non empty, i.e. there exist properties which are motivational although not relevant (even though the individual might be aware or not of their existence).

Given that the choice of the individual (and therefore, his preferences) may depend on the context, we define the individual I as a collection of selves $\{I_{C'}, I_{C''}, I_{C'''}, \dots\}$. I is an enduring living entity, whose selves $I_{C'}, I_{C''}, I_{C'''}$, etc. are connected over time by some relations (which we do not need to specify in this article).⁹ When I faces a choice problem in a context C , he exists through a particular self I_C embedded in this context C . Furthermore, we define the counterfactual enlightened self I_0 describing how I would choose in a ‘context-free’ environment — guaranteeing that his choices only depend on properties that are considered as relevant from the theoretician’s perspective.

Knowing that the individual I is embodied within different selves over time $I_{C'}, I_{C''}, I_{C'''}$, etc., this will likely lead to incoherent behaviours *as judged by* I_0 (or equivalently, as judged by the theoretician). According to the view from nowhere, the normative authority of I lies in I_0 : this means that I is willing to let the social planner choose for himself because nothing guarantees that the choice of I_C will correspond to the choice of I_0 . By contrast, Sugden (2004, 2018) intends to address his recommendations to the ‘responsible person’ I , who turns out to be embodied within every I_C . The view from somewhere thus locates the normative authority of I in each self I_C . We share the position of Sugden that the correct addressee of normative economics should not be I_0 but I — whom we call the *enduring* individual, to be distinguished from his multiple selves $I_{C'}, I_{C''}, I_{C'''}$. We suggest, however, that it is necessary for every I_C to have a minimal ability of self-reflection, giving him the possibility to imagine himself in another context, and then to form counterfactual judgements about how $I_{C'}, I_{C''}, I_{C'''}$, etc. would choose in their own context. According to the view from *anywhere*, it is not only each self I_C who matters, it is their shared ability to imagine the choice problem from different perspectives that gives a normative authority to the enduring individual I .

3 The View from *Anywhere*

Rather than leaving the task of defining the correct context to the theoretician, or merely accepting the current context (which can be set by a third party, for better or worse), we propose that it should fall to the enduring individual to define his own normative preferences. It is only through the fruitful confrontation of his different selves I_C that I will be able to choose what makes him better off, while limiting the risk of being manipulated or unduly influenced by a third party. We introduce the second-person standpoint in order to highlight the distinctive feature of our approach, and propose a

⁹Precisely, one can assume here that there exists an ontological criterion which defines the identity of an individual over time but we remain silent on *what* could possibly constitute such an identity (e.g. psychological, physical, narrative or sociological relations). See Mitrouchev and Buonomo (2020) for a detailed discussion.

normative criterion of *self-determination*.

3.1 The Second-Person Standpoint

The second-person standpoint locates normative authority in *others*. It is because *I* recognises the authority of others to make claims and expect something from him that *I* can be held morally responsible for his actions when they impact others. Darwall (2006) uses as an illustration the right a person *A* has that others (a person *B*, for instance) do not step on his feet. *B*'s stepping on *A*'s feet is morally questionable not only because it causes harm to *A* (which is a third-person reason for not stepping on *A*'s feet), but also because *B* violates the right *A* has that others do not step on his feet. Unlike a general moral principle such as 'do not cause harm', this is a second-person reason for not stepping on another one's feet because it has a direct addressee: the morally responsible individual *B*.

The second-person standpoint can also be addressed to *oneself*. Just as *A* has a second-person reason that *B* does not step on his feet (because it is his right and a legitimate demand), *A* has a second-person reason to not step on others' feet since he may later feel guilty and hold himself responsible for violating others' rights. In the dessert problem, *I*'s afternoon self (who intends to be productive) has the right to claim that *I*'s current self does not ruin his later productivity by ordering a dessert. If *I*'s current self recognises that this is a legitimate demand, he is accountable for actions that will affect his afternoon self's productivity. However, the same is true of *I*'s current self. He has the right to claim that *I*'s afternoon self does not impose the ruining of the end of the meal by skipping dessert. If *I*'s afternoon self recognises that this is a legitimate demand, then he cannot blame his current self for ruining his later productivity by ordering a dessert. Given the potential conflict between the claims of the current and afternoon selves, it is necessary to settle this dispute by establishing a contract between *I*'s different selves.¹⁰

A way to minimise the effect of potential regret — which is a common argument in the literature to justify paternalistic interventions — is to ensure that the individual *I* is *a priori* aware of such a potential conflict, and that *I* takes responsibility as an enduring individual for the actions of his different selves. In the restaurant, once *I* is well aware of the tradeoff between an immediate enjoyment and a later productivity, *I* can choose whether his current self should order the dessert or not, knowing the consequences for his afternoon self. As a result, none of his selves would be able to legitimately blame the other for taking the dessert or not. It is possible that *I*'s afternoon self later complains about the current self ordering the dessert, but this would not be a legitimate complaint if the dispute has already been settled. The problem of such a complaint is that the afternoon self wants the current self to skip dessert, while *immediately* enjoying the benefits in the afternoon. In this case, the afternoon self does not fully appreciate the opportunity cost that the current self supports.¹¹ Managing the relationships between

¹⁰The formal resolution of this question is out of the scope of the current article. The most natural way to deal with it would be to use a model of intrapersonal team reasoning (Gold 2018, 2021) and to consider that the enduring individual *I* is constituted by a team of the different selves I_C . The nature of the contract between the selves would then determine how they aggregate their individual preferences into stable preferences at the team level, offering a measure of the mutual advantage of the different selves (Karpus and Radzvilas 2018).

¹¹See Lecouteux (2015) for a detailed treatment of this argument, using retirement savings as an

his different selves is the role of the enduring individual I , whose identity defines the nature of these relationships.¹² The adequate standpoint to form one's normative preferences is therefore the view from *anywhere* since the relevant positions to judge what is the 'right' choice are the *many positions* from which one could see the choice problem.¹³

Rather than defining welfare with respect to an arbitrary external criterion stated by the theoretician (that would always privilege the inner rational agent I_0), or systematically equating it with the current revealed preferences (meaning that such a criterion would always privilege the current self I_C), what matters in our approach is the *process* of confronting one's different perspectives on a choice problem. It is questionable to state that either I_0 or I_C should always have the final say on what is best for I . On the one hand, imposing I_0 as the self who has the normative authority would be unacceptable for an individual who values e.g. spontaneity (which is hardly reconcilable with the consistent behaviour of I_0). On the other hand, imposing I_C could be unacceptable for an individual who considers — upon reflection, from the perspective of another context — that some contexts are normatively questionable. Instead of grounding normative authority on either I_0 or I_C , our normative approach defends the idea that it falls to I to choose what is best for him.

As an illustration, consider the Asian disease experiment of Tversky and Kahneman (1981, p. 453). An unusual Asian disease is expected to kill 600 individuals. You are asked to choose between two different health programs. The first one is efficient but costly: you will save for sure 200 individuals and let 400 die. The second one is experimental and risky, with 1 chance out of 3 to save 600 individuals (and no death) and 2 chances out of 3 to save nobody, with 600 deaths. The choice between the two programs can be framed in terms of gains or losses (the % below corresponds to the share of subjects who choose the program in Tversky and Kahneman's experiment, and N corresponds to the total number of subjects per frame).

Frame 'gain' [N = 152]

A: 200 people will be saved [72%]

B: 1/3 probability that 600 people will be saved,
and 2/3 probability that no people will be saved [28%]

Frame 'loss' [N = 155]

C: 400 people will die [22%]

D: 1/3 probability that nobody will die,
and 2/3 probability that 600 people will die [78%]

illustration.

¹²We do not treat pathological cases of personality disorders, to which it would be hard to apply our normative approach.

¹³An earlier version of this article used the term 'view from everywhere'. This formulation suggested that one is required to confront *every* perspective of a choice problem in order to make an adequate normative judgement. Such a standpoint would however require an exhaustive confrontation and an endless phase of critical self-reflection. As a consequence, it would require that individuals have unlimited cognitive capacities. Furthermore, the exhaustiveness of the view from everywhere would lead to an omniscient perspective akin to the one of the view from nowhere (even though no individual nor theoretician is able to offer such a perspective). We thank Uskali Mäki for suggesting to us the neologism *anywhere*, which is more faithful to our normative approach based on intrasubjective judgements rather than on an objective judgement.

In this experiment we can clearly see that preferences are likely to change depending on whether the problem is framed in terms of gain or loss (although some may consistently choose A & C and B & D). The issue for the theoretician is then to determine which program is normatively preferred by individuals (if we can use this expression when facing such a stark choice), knowing that the preferences revealed through their choices are likely to depend on the way the choice problem is framed.

According to the view from somewhere, there is not necessarily a problem in choosing inconsistently across frames: it falls to I_C in each choice problem to choose the best program. According to the view from nowhere, I_0 ought to choose consistently across frames if the theoretician imposes the principle of *invariance*, implying an equivalence between the choice problems A & C and B & D.¹⁴ According to the view from *anywhere*, what matters is that the individual embedded in a particular context (say, the gain frame) should also have the means to imagine herself in the other context (say, the loss frame). It is then only by becoming aware of these two frames — in terms of lives saved and lost — that I will be able to avoid a genuine and unintentional framing effect. Eventually, this will lead him to determine the ‘best choice’, *as judged by himself*. What matters is however not his final choice (e.g. choosing A & D), but that he has the possibility to confront the different views prior to his decision.

3.2 The Self-Determination Criterion

We arrive at the formulation of our normative criterion. As a reminder from the formal definitions exposed in Section 2.2, we make a distinction between (i) motivational properties $P \in \mathcal{M}_I \subseteq \mathcal{P}$, (ii) known properties $P \in \mathcal{K}_I \subseteq \mathcal{P}$, and (iii) relevant properties $P \in \mathcal{R}_I \subseteq \mathcal{P}$. We also defined context properties as the properties which are motivational but not relevant: $P \in \mathcal{C}_I = \mathcal{M}_I \setminus \mathcal{R}_I$. We also assumed, for the sake of simplicity, that the theoretician correctly identifies the entire set of motivational properties \mathcal{M}_I — i.e. she knows precisely to which properties the individual is sensitive behaviourally. The whole problem is that, from the perspective of the theoretician, we cannot be certain that the properties in \mathcal{R}_I are the correct ones (it is indeed the theoretician’s representation of the problem).

According to the view from nowhere, we have to imagine the behaviour of I_0 , who is supposed to exhibit context-independent preferences: since $\mathcal{C}_{I_0} = \emptyset$, we know that the set of relevant properties corresponds precisely to the set of motivational properties. In this approach, the behaviour of I_0 thus gives direct evidence of I ’s welfare. The problem is however that reaching a context-independent judgement on the counterfactual choice of I_0 may not be possible for an actual theoretician. We will very likely see theoreticians giving their *own* value judgement on the problem at stake, even though some may genuinely believe that they provide a context-independent judgement. This implies that the view from nowhere cannot be implemented in practice.

According to the view from somewhere, the correct perspective to look at the problem is the individual himself: this means, in practical terms, that for any context

¹⁴For a precise definition of the principle of invariance, see Tversky and Kahneman (1986). Note however that considering the frames of gain and loss to be identical in the Asian disease experiment may actually not be self-evident (Jullien 2016).

$C, C_{I_C} = \emptyset$. If a property is motivational, the theoretician has no reason to consider that it is not relevant to I . The solution offered here to identify the set \mathcal{R}_I is radical: we simply reject the possibility of context-properties, and prefer to include all motivational properties in the set of relevant properties (allowing the theoretician to preserve the principle of consumer sovereignty). The difficulty is that some individuals may still consider, upon reflection, when looking at a choice problem from another perspective, that their behaviour may have been unduly influenced. This means that I_C may consider that $C_{I_{C'}} \neq \emptyset$, implying that he is aware that — when I will have to choose in context C' — I as an enduring individual may regret his choice.

Our proposal is therefore the following: it should be the responsibility of I himself to judge whether he should choose according to the preferences of I_C or $I_{C'}$. Because of the impossibility of observing directly the set of relevant properties of I (properties which are constitutive of his welfare), yet knowing that some contexts could be perceived as problematic by some I_C themselves, we propose to *extend the informational basis* from which I forms his normative judgements.

Self-Determination Criterion. Consider the triplets of sets of properties $S = \{\mathcal{M}, \mathcal{P}, \mathcal{R}\}$ and $S' = \{\mathcal{M}', \mathcal{P}', \mathcal{R}'\}$. S is strictly normatively preferred to S' if $\mathcal{M} \setminus \mathcal{K} \subset \mathcal{M}' \setminus \mathcal{K}'$.

Our normative criterion can then rank a triplet $S = \{\mathcal{M}, \mathcal{P}, \mathcal{R}\}$ without reference to the set of relevant properties \mathcal{R} , i.e. the properties that the theoretician considers as *a priori* relevant for the individual. This means that the judgement of the theoretician on \mathcal{R} , and therefore on the set of context properties $\mathcal{C} = \mathcal{M} \setminus \mathcal{R}$, is irrelevant for this normative criterion. What matters is the set $\mathcal{M} \setminus \mathcal{K}$, which corresponds to the set of properties which are motivational and *not* known. That is to say, it is preferable to be aware of more properties that are motivational than less.

This normative criterion can be interpreted in a ‘negative’ sense, i.e. it is preferable to limit the number of factors that influence I without him being aware of this influence. A complementary, more ‘positive’ interpretation, when $\mathcal{M} = \mathcal{M}'$, is that it allows the individual to consider the choice problem under additional new perspectives — such as the loss frame in the Asian disease experiment, which may considerably decrease the appeal of program A. What matters here is I 's ability to *accumulate and confront* many views from different perspectives. Note that we do not expect individuals to be aware of all motivational properties and similarly, to look at every possible perspective on a given problem, which would require the extraordinary cognitive capacities of the inner rational agent. Our normative criterion states that it is better for individuals to be aware of more and more factors amongst all the factors that influence their preferences. If behavioural economists find a new result about how individuals behave, they ought to convey the information to these individuals rather than to benevolent nudgers who could use such knowledge as a way to promote what *they* think is best for these individuals.

Consider again the dessert problem. The only context property is the relative location of the cake, and it is unknown to the individual. Suppose that on a given day, the individual would choose the cake if and only if it is sufficiently ahead of others

(e.g. the value of $P_\ell(\text{Cake})$ exceeds a certain threshold $p_{ell}^{\bar{}}$), which means that the nudge of the restaurant owner is quite efficient to influence the individual's choice. According to the view from nowhere, we have to imagine how the individual would choose in a context-free environment, e.g. if P_ℓ was not motivational. The problem is that this counterfactual scenario does not essentially exist (there will necessarily be a value for $P_\ell(\text{Cake})$), and we cannot conceive such a 'context-free' environment. The temptation for the theoretician would then be to imagine that the correct choice of the individual corresponds *in fine* to her own conception of the good choice (e.g. skip dessert and work harder later), and that the choice made in a counterfactual context-free environment corresponds to the choice made in contexts such that $P_\ell(\text{Cake}) < \bar{p}_\ell$ (precisely because it leads *in fine* to what the theoretician considers as the good choice, skipping dessert). This is however largely arbitrary: we could similarly argue that the correct choice for the individual consists in picking the chocolate cake, and that he is occasionally refrained from doing so when the cake is in the back (because of e.g. a fear of the social stigma of voluntarily taking a slightly less accessible dessert). Our criterion states that the theoretician should not try to identify a correct choice (and thus, identify the context leading the individual to make this choice). She should rather contribute to inform the general public that the relative location of items matter in their decision (P_ℓ would then be a known property), and that the correct approach to choose in such a situation is for the individual to imagine himself in the contexts when $P_\ell(\text{Cake}) < \bar{p}_\ell$ and $P_\ell(\text{Cake}) \geq \bar{p}_\ell$ prior to making his choice. Once the individual becomes aware of the different perspectives on the choice problem (when the cake is ahead of others or not), then we can consider that I , as an enduring individual, can take full responsibility for his actions, and is likely to avoid an unintentional framing effect. Given the choice faced by the individual of an immediate enjoyment implying a delayed cost, we could also perfectly imagine that I — if he is unable to decisively choose between the two alternatives — willingly choose to use the context as a convenient heuristic to order the dessert or not. His final choice is however not a concern for the theoretician, who only pays attention to the conditions of the choice process.

A possible limitation of our normative criterion is that we only allow for comparisons between nested sets of 'motivational and unknown' properties, and are unable to rank overlapping sets according to the criterion.¹⁵ This poses however a genuine issue only in cases for which we would need precise measurements of property sets, for instance if we have to choose between two programs to fund — such as e.g. a prevention campaign against obesity based on messages highlighting either the addictive power of added sugars, or the effects of marketing on certain populations (both of them are properties which are motivational and probably unknown to many). Apart from those situations which require additional elements to rank property sets, the main added value of our normative criterion is to shift the focus from outcomes and preference satisfaction to the factors that shape individual choices and the dynamics of preference formation. A solution would be to measure the 'quality' of different properties in terms of behavioural impact: if a property has a significant effect on behaviour when unknown (such as the loss frame) compared to another (such as the relative location of the cake on the buffet), then it is *a priori* preferable to be aware of the former property. If we have at our disposal a metric for the degree to which properties impact individual behaviour

¹⁵Note that we find a similar difficulty with Sugden's individual opportunity criterion. See Sugden (2018, p. 85).

when not known, we could also limit the risk of choice overload by targeting only the properties which have a relatively significant behavioural impact.

In the next section we propose two justifications of our normative criterion in terms of Sugden's (2004, 2018) opportunity criterion, and Sen's (2009) 'positional views' in his theory of justice.

4 Two Justifications of the View from *Manywhere*

4.1 Opportunity Extended

We can interpret our normative criterion as an extension of Sugden's (2018, Ch. 5) individual opportunity criterion to the process of preference formation. Sugden emphasises that the theoretician should not try to answer for others the question 'how should one live?' (which is a question that should be left to ethicists) but rather the question 'how do we live *together*?' (which is a question that can be addressed by economists). In his approach, societies must be such that the opportunity of individuals to act on any preference should be maximised. A point that is however not discussed by Sugden (2018) is whether individuals have the ability to merely *conceive* other preferences. We follow Davis (2011), who argues that individuals have the capacity to critically reflect upon their own evolving preferences and to continually redefine their identity through self-reflection. If we accept such a dynamic view of personal identity, we should consider that individuals' preferences do not *pre-exist* the choice situation, but are rather *progressively determined by the process of choice*. As Nozick (1981) puts it,

'The reasons [considered in deliberation] do not come with previously given precisely specified weights; the decision process is not one of discovering such precise weights but of assigning them.' (p. 294)

If what matters is that individuals can satisfy any preference they might have, this necessarily requires ensuring that social institutions allow individuals to experience different preferences. This means fostering (or at least not deterring) the creativity of individuals. A good way to ensure that individuals do not stay stuck in a single conception of their life is to make sure that they have the opportunity to learn. The process of preference formation is likely to be path-dependent, i.e. it depends on the individual's initial sets of representation of the world. If the individual is only aware of one way to look at the world (e.g. he always chooses the cheapest good without considering some counterparts, such as lower wages for the employees who produced it), then his opportunities to learn new preferences are very likely to be reduced (see Schubert's (2015) 'opportunity to learn' criterion). Yet if we value opportunity with choice sets and accept that one's identity is the result of an evolving process and critical reflection upon one's experiences, then opportunity also seems to be valuable when considering the sets of possible future identities (Buchanan 1979 [1999]; Dold 2018). In line with Dold and Schubert (2018), our normative criterion emphasises that economists should contribute to improve the *process* through which *I* forms his own preferences, but they must not focus on the satisfaction of his preferences.

The problem one might have with an approach that promotes 'teaching' new preferences or properties to individuals is that the theoretician can be suspected of teaching

only what *she* thinks are valuable preferences (e.g. preferring cycling over taking one's car or saving more for one's retirement). Our aim is not to promote a normative approach in which we should tell individuals what 'good' preferences are, but rather to make sure that they are well informed, i.e. that they are aware of what makes them prefer some options over others. In this regard, it is preferable for an individual to have an unhealthy behaviour (smoking, overeating, drinking too much alcohol) while being perfectly aware and fine with the reasons that led him to have such behaviours, than for the same individual to have a much healthier behaviour while ignoring why he behaves like that (e.g. because of social norms of fat-shaming, and/or overvaluing physical appearance).

4.2 Positional Views

Another justification of our normative criterion is the parallel we see with Sen's (2009) concept of 'positional views' in his theory of justice. Baujard and Gilardone (2017, 2019) emphasise that Sen's theory of justice is 'poorly understood', which is why it continues to raise many debates, such as the proper place of capabilities in his theory of justice. We suggest that one of the reasons of these misunderstandings is that Sen endorses the second-person standpoint in his theory of justice. Sen explicitly rejects third-person approaches, which consist of defining a normative criterion in a transcendental perspective. At the same time, he considers that individual preferences are not necessarily informative about individual welfare. This is because of the phenomenon of adaptive preferences: first-person judgements about one's welfare can depend on one's current state of deprivation. Our argument is based on exactly the same concerns. We consider that the theoretician should refrain from imposing what she thinks individuals should prefer (because of the arbitrariness of such a standpoint), but at the same time, she should acknowledge that there might be problematic situations in which satisfying individuals' preferences may not be in their best interests.

Discussing the case of normatively problematic preferences in Sen's work (1985, 1992, 2001), Sugden (2006) argues that the position of Sen implies 'that "we", as ethical theorists, can claim to know better than some particular individual what is good for [him]' (p. 34). According to Sugden's reading of Sen, the viewpoint from which this normative judgement is formulated is 'the viewpoint of a moral observer, making "judgements", "assessments" or "evaluations" of a person's state from outside' (p. 36). Theoreticians would then impose as the social standard 'the kinds of lives that a majority of [our] fellow citizens, after reflective deliberation and open debate, judge to be valuable' (p. 40). However, Sen (2006) rejects this 'monstrous political philosophy' (p. 89). He argues that the emphasis should be put on the *process* through which individual desires are formed and confronted, while guaranteeing *in fine* the respect of his own preferences. It is true that the theoretician have predefined ideas about what counts as a good life, but such ideas should only serve as inputs among other inputs in the collective discussion.

Our approach turns out to be very similar to Sen's normative approach. In our view, the role of the theoretician should not be to impose her own conception of a good life, nor to convince individuals to endorse what is collectively considered as a good life. Instead, her role is to promote their ability to enter into such a phase of self-reflection, so that they could have the opportunity to choose what is best for themselves. Promoting

individual self-reflection does not mean that individuals ought to endorse a ‘rational’ behaviour — such as the one promoted by the proponents of behavioural paternalism. Instead, it means ensuring that individuals do not stay trapped in a behaviour they could consider as problematic if they became aware of the reasons leading to such a behaviour. In the dessert problem, ‘being within sight’ may be a necessary condition for many individuals to actually order the dessert — implying that I never orders the dessert when it is not within sight. The self-determination criterion means that it is better for I to be able to imagine what he would do in another context (when the dessert is within sight). Whether I turns out to order the dessert much more frequently (because he considers that the location of the dessert does not matter that much) is however not relevant with respect to the self-determination criterion.

According to Baujard and Gilardone (2019), the concept of ‘positional views’ in Sen’s (2009) *Idea of Justice* accommodates the two positions of (i) not imposing the normative preferences of the theoretician, and (ii) acknowledging that some preferences might be problematic from individuals’ own perspective. A positional view is defined as ‘an individual judgement towards any social state, considering objectively the context from which she or he is able to assess this social state’ (Sen 2009, p. 3). One’s positional view can evolve if some information from different positions is communicated. For example, the individual’s judgement on a policy debate (like the implementation of a universal basic income) is likely to depend on various elements that characterise his current position (positional parameters), such as being in a situation of poverty or not, being in a health condition that limits his opportunities of employment, etc.

Positional views can be ‘objectivised’ because they can be described by the individual (e.g. being poor or not, being handicapped or not, etc.). The notion of ‘objectivised’ here does not presuppose that there is one ‘correct’ way to describe such positional views (or that such positional views are objectively true or have an independent existence), but that they can be made understandable to others. Since such positional views ‘(1) may influence observation and (2) can apply to different persons’ (Sen 1993, p. 127) they can constitute a relevant input for collective decision. The confrontation of such positional views in a phase of public deliberation then contributes to the emergence of an *intersubjective* view on the question. We advance that it is only by confronting many views from different positions that individuals can collectively form an enlightened judgement about a specific state of affairs. The relevant inputs for normative analysis are therefore the views of all the various individuals that constitute society. Confronting different positional views offers a way to *widen* the informational basis of all participants.

The approach we promote — the view from *anywhere* — is based on a similar reasoning. Each self I_C can ‘objectivise’ his current position/context C based on the various properties P that characterises C . If I_C has the ability to imagine the context C' of $I_{C'}$ that is described by different values of the properties P , then I_C can enter into this phase of self-reflection and form *in fine* an *intrasubjective* judgement. The normative criterion of self-determination means that we should widen the number of properties the individual is aware of. This means increasing I ’s ability to characterise the various contexts C and then widening the informational basis of his intrasubjective judgement. Just as in our proposition, Sen’s (2009) theory of justice shifts normative appraisal from *outcomes* to the *process* of choice, and does not make any presumption about the

outcome of public reasoning.

This means that there is no ready-made theory of what a ‘good’ society is (or what ‘good’ preferences are) but that there is a general approach (confronting the different views on the same question) that contributes to form collective judgements. If the theoretician turns out to be aware of some positional parameters (in our approach, the properties P) then she ought to inform individuals about these properties. Whether individuals eventually take them into consideration is however not relevant to the theoretician. What matters is that each self I_C has the ability to imagine what his preferences in other contexts would be, and possibly choose to act on the basis of the preferences of another self $I_{C'}$, depending on how I — as an enduring individual — defines his identity and relationship between his different selves.

5 Concluding Remarks

In this article we propose an alternative answer to the reconciliation problem by distinguishing between different standpoints one could take to define individuals’ welfare. Our contribution is to propose a second-person approach to normative economics, according to which the definition of one’s normative preferences should be the result of an intrapersonal discussion and fruitful confrontation of different perspectives on a choice problem. This approach — that we label the ‘view from *anywhere*’ — states that our aim as theoreticians should be to widen the informational basis of individuals so that they can have the opportunity to adapt their own preferences, *as judged by themselves*. This can solve some of the issues of first-person and third-person approaches, since the view from *anywhere* (i) remains agnostic about how individuals should choose, and (ii) ensures they have the means to understand why they choose as they do, and the possibility of changing their choices if they want to.

By conferring a significant role to the external observer (the theoretician being the only judge of the normative authority of individual preferences), third-person approaches may easily give a justification for paternalistic regulation such as nudging policies, in order to steer individuals’ behaviour into what they think is the ‘right’ direction (Thaler and Sunstein 2009). First-person approaches, on the other hand, take individuals’ preferences as their protected sphere of liberty and reject any policy intervention aiming at interfering with the expression of individuals’ freedom of choice. Whatever their preferences turn out to be, individuals are considered as responsible persons — i.e. they are accountable for their own choices. The implication is that there is no need for paternalistic regulation. The aim of the theoretician is here only to ensure that society is organised in such a way that individuals can express their freedom of choice. In these approaches, the exclusive aim of public policies should be to guarantee the respect of the rules of fair competition.

By focusing on the internal process of preference formation, the second-person approach offers a rationale for more ‘educational’ policies. The aim is to foster individuals’ abilities to critically reflect on their own preferences and increase their opportunities to learn new preferences. In our view, theoreticians should ensure that society guarantees that each individual can learn new properties and accumulate complementary views on

different choice situations. This is typically the philosophy of the *boost* agenda (Grüne-Yanoff and Hertwig 2016) inspired by Gigerenzer and Todd's (1999) simple heuristics program and by Gigerenzer's (2015) call for reforming school curriculums in order to improve individuals' health, financial, and risk literacy.

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