Expressive behavior in economics and politics: 
An overview and perspective*

Arye L. Hillman

Department of Economics
Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan 52900 Israel

Abstract:
Expressive behavior was introduced into economic and politics through expressive voting. Expressive voting is a form of expressive behavior. In behaving expressively, people choose an identity and maximize utility to confirm their identity to themselves and to others. In being expressively they may be basically generous or basically selfish. Expressive behavior gives rise to externalities that can be beneficial for recipients when expressive people are basically generous. Sources of negative externalities are behavior without regard for moral hazard and related attribution of moral merit to “underdogs” without regard for the ethics underlying behavior. Transposing facts to opinion and appeal to political correctness defend the utility from expressive behavior. Expressive behavior predicated on identity explains outcomes in experiments in prisoners’ dilemma, trust, ultimatum and dictatorship games and public polices with regard to the welfare state, foreign aid, and immigration. Expressive behavior occurs in academia. Expressive voting and more generally expressive behavior are the source of additional reservations about reliance on collective rather than individual market decisions.

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Introduction

Neo-classical economic analysis described individual behavior based on axioms that define rational behavior. The axioms underlie preferences over outcomes achieved through personal market spending or as the consequence of voting on taxation and public spending issues of public finance; the utility function also included altruism and envy. Behavioral economics has expanded the domain of analysis beyond the traditional rationality axioms; people have been shown to have preferences for equality or to behave in ways that exhibit inequality aversion; the axioms of expected utility have been shown to be violated in experiments involving risk; people have been revealed as not necessarily behaving as predicted by rationality axioms in public good, ultimatum, dictatorship, and trust games; and new concepts such as loss aversion, hyperbolic discounting, and framing have been used to explain “non-rational” behavior. The explanatory framework for economic behavior includes emotions and spontaneous neurological responses. It has also been recognized that voting can be expressive, that is, people make decisions about whether and how to vote based on utility from expressing themselves. This paper provides an overview of expressive voting and considers the consequences of more general concept of expressive behavior of which expressive voting is part. Part 1 sets out conceptual aspects of expressive behavior and reinterprets experimental evidence. Part 2 considers causes and consequences of expressive behavior, including the relation between income and expressive behavior and the role of information, and the consequences for public policy regarding the welfare state, foreign aid, and migration. Part 3 is a comment on expressive behavior in academia.

PART I:

CONCEPTUAL ASPECTS AND EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE

1. EXPRESSIVE VOTING

Expressive voters
The literature on expressive voting, following on from the insights of Buchanan (1954) and Tullock (1971), is substantial, and includes for example Glazer (1987), Brennan and Lomansky (1993), Brennan and Hammond (2000), and Schuessler (2000). Expressive voters vote for an outcome that they would not vote for, if they knew that their vote was decisive (or if they believe that there is a sufficiently high probability their vote of being decisive). Expressive voting contrasts with instrumental voting, according to
which voting is an instrument or means for achieving a sought outcome through voting. The generally used example for expressive voting is voting to give personal income or wealth to people in need: expressive voters obtain utility from voting for charity but incur disutility if actually obliged to give. The expressive-voting hypothesis was formulated in response to the “paradox of voting”, which is that the decision to vote is inconsistent with a personal cost-benefit comparison when the cost of voting is the time taken to vote and the expected benefit is the likelihood of a voter’s vote being decisive, because the probability of being decisive in usual sized electorates is effectively zero. Utility from self-expression through voting is an additional source of benefit from voting. Adding the utility from self-expression can make the personal benefit from voting exceed the personal cost of taking time to vote and thereby explains the decision to vote.

The role of the zero probability of being decisive

The paradox of voting is based on the zero benefit from voting because of the zero probability of being decisive. The same zero probability of being decisive underlies expressive voting. When voting expressively, people rationally do not expect to influence the outcome of voting. The cost of voting expressively is therefore only the time taken to vote, which can be expected to be low, and for expressive voters is less than the utility obtained from voting expressively.

Expressive voting: a simple model

A consensus vote of two taxpayers is required for a charitable income transfer to take place. Each of the voters can therefore veto, either by voting against or by abstaining. For both taxpayers:

\[
U(\text{voting in favor of transfers}) = 1.
\]

\[
U(\text{paying for income transfers}) = -2.
\]

\[
U(\text{not voting for and therefore not paying taxes for income transfers}) = 0
\]

The payoffs from this game are shown in table 1. Each person is best off with benefit \{1\} from voting for income transfers that do not have to be made because the other person has not voted in favor. Voting against the income transfers (which then do not have to be made) provides utility of zero, whatever the decision of the other voter. If both voters support the income transfers, they have utility of \{1\} from their expressive voting but disutility of \{-2\} because they actually have to make the income transfers, leaving utility of \{-1\}. There is no dominant strategy in this game. There are two Nash equilibria in pure strategies at (1, 0) and (0, 1) where one person votes in favor of the transfers and the other does not. The Nash equilibrium in mixed strategies is to vote in favor of or against income transfers with probability of 0.5. The likelihood of each of the four outcomes is 0.25. The expected utility from participation in the game is positive and equal to 0.5. The probability of

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1 This is table 7.4 reproduced from Hillman (2009).
the unfortunate outcome for the voters where they both vote in favor of the income transfers is 0.25.²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person 2 votes against income transfers</th>
<th>Person 2 votes in favor of income transfers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person 1 votes against income transfers</td>
<td>0,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person 1 votes in favor of income transfers</td>
<td>1,0</td>
</tr>
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**Reputation and voting externalities in a sequential game**

If decisions were sequential, the first person to vote would vote in favor of the income transfers and the second person against. A person who can credibly commit to voting in favor of the income transfers therefore gains through expressive voting. In a sequential game the first voter has an advantage: the first to vote votes for charity and the second voter vetoes. If voter 1 votes first, voter 2 vetoes. Voter 1 is happy that voter 2 is present to veto. If the voting is publicized, voter 2 is blamed for the outcome that no income transfers take place and voter 1 gains by being “liked” because of generosity that he or she has exhibited through voting. Voter 1 has higher utility because of being able to vote expressively. There has been a voting externality impose negatively on voter 2 by voter 1; by voting against, voter 2 has provided a positive externality for voter 1, who does not have to pay.

**Repeated simultaneous games**

If voter 1 has established a reputation as being charitable through proclaiming the merit of good causes, in simultaneous repeated games, voter 2 knowing voter 1’s reputation, maximizes utility in any single game by vetoing. Voter 2 is however expressive as is voter 1; the asymmetry is that voter 1 has managed to establish a reputation for voting for charity. Of course, voter 2 may not always veto in a repeated game. An equilibrium may emerge where the two voters take turns in vetoing, in which case the voters share the utility over time from expressive voting.

² Each person can obtain zero with certainty by voting against the income transfers. The consequence of voting in favor depends on the decision of the other person. Denoting the probability that the other person votes against by $P_A$, the expected utility from voting in favor of the transfers is $\{1P_A + (-1)(1-P_A)\}$, which when set equal to the certain utility of zero from voting against the income transfers and solving yields $P_A=0.5$. 

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**Voting externalities with large numbers of voters**

With large numbers of expressive voters, decisions are not strategic. All voters benefit from the utility of expressive voting, knowing that the cost of voting expressively is only the time taken to vote, because no voter is decisive. In the Nash equilibrium, utility is \{-1\}, composed of utility of \{1\} from voting for the transfers and utility of \{-2\} from paying taxes to finance the transfers. There has been a negative mutual voting externality for all the voters because of expressive voting. With large numbers of voters, the awareness that a single vote is not decisive allows everyone to vote expressively without the fear that a personal vote will be decisive in determining that income transfers take place.\(^3\) With the Nash equilibrium being that all expressive voters vote for income transfers, majorities thus support outcomes when individuals if they were decisive would vote against the transfers.\(^4\)

**Expressive political parties**

Members of an expressive majority benefit when the political party for which they voted is also expressive in favoring extensive redistribution but never implements the redistribution. The expressive majority has benefitted from expressive voting but does not need to make the payments for which it voted. The political party supported by the expressive majority uses rhetoric to make proclamations about the need to help people in need. The party leaders know that if they proceed beyond rhetoric to actually implement the policies of income redistribution, they will be defeated by another political party supported by the expressive majority that proclaims the need for but does not implement redistribution.

**Expressive media**

The media can likewise be expressive. If the purpose of the media is to be popular because of profit, an expressive media will cater to expressive voters. Where the media does not depend on profit through popularity, the people in the media may themselves be expressive and propagate expressive positions. When the media is relied upon for substantive information that has bearing on personal financial wealth, we do not expect expressive behavior.

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\(^3\) It is the large number of voters that allows the expressive behavior. Sobel and Wagner (2004) proposed and tested the hypothesis that larger electorates result in more expressive voting indicated by the extent of redistribution. The data was for US states and the empirical results confirmed the hypothesis. The probability of being a decisive voter is negligible when the size of the electorate reaches that of any state. Of course, other evidence from behavioral economics suggests that not everyone can compute objective probabilities.

\(^4\) See for example Brennan and Hamlin (2000) on incidental voting for virtuous outcomes. They use the term “veil of insignificance” (not attributable to them); one might wonder if there is indeed a veil. Rawls’ veil of ignorance has a veil because people face unresolved uncertainty in people not knowing who they will. An individual voter in a usual voting population does not confront uncertainty but rather knows with near certainty that he or she will not be decisive.
Expressive behavior and externalities
Expressive voting would not be important if there were not accompanying externalities. There are, of course, externalities intrinsically associated with voting; the externalities arise because voters do not internalize the consequences of their vote for the utility of others. Expressive voting adds further voting externalities to the already present voting externalities.5

Compulsory voting
In most locations, whether to vote is discretionary. Voting can also be compulsory (as is the case in Australia). Compulsory voting solves a free-rider problem in a prisoners’ dilemma because of the coordination enforced on voters to participate in a collective decision.6 Compulsory voting is consistent with expressive voting; voters know that their individual vote will not be decisive and can derive utility by expressing themselves through their voting decision. They express themselves through the decision how to vote, given that they are obliged to vote (or pay a penalty).

Regret about not voting
Regret about not voting has been proposed as reason for voting: if no one voted because everyone believed that a single vote is insignificant, everyone would regret not voting; that is, everyone not voting is not a Nash equilibrium. Given the number of people who vote, it is unlikely that regret is a reason for people voting. Yet also, because of new information, people sometimes express regret about for whom they voted; such regret is clear evidence of expressive voting because the opportunity to change for whom a person voted would not change the electoral outcome when the voter is not decisive. As Brennan and Hamlin (2000, p. 31) note 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.”

2. IDENTITY

Identity and expressive behavior
Expressive behavior is related to the concept of identity. People express their identity when voting expressively. The decision to vote is a means of expressing socially responsible identity as a person who acts in accord with requirements of civil duty. In how they vote, expressive voters can identify with attributes of political candidates or with the policies that the candidates

5 See Tullock (1959) and for example Hillman (2009a, chapter 6).
6 Hillman (2009, chapter 2).
and political parties advocate. As with expressive voting, expressive behavior more generally expresses identity.

**The Akerlof – Kranton specification of identity**

Identity has been the subject of an extensive social-science literature. A model of identity has been proposed by Akerlof and Kranton (2000), who add identity to the utility function to specify

\[ U_j = U_j(a_j, a_{-j}, I_j), \]

where \( a_j \) are the actions of person \( j \) and \( a_{-j} \) are the actions of all others other than \( j \). \( I_j \) is person \( j \)'s “self-image”, determined as:

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

\( c_j \) denotes the social categories that have been assigned to person \( j \); the higher the assigned social status, the better the individual’s self-image. \( \varepsilon_j \) 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 of different social categories in different circumstances. Behavior is strategic. Akerlof and Kranton focus on cases where the category \( c_j \) is exogenously predetermined by gender. Identity is expressed through the relation between gender and occupation: there are “men’s jobs” and “women’s jobs” and the utility of men is diminished through diminution of perceived masculinity when women take men’s jobs. Akerlof and Kranton propose that within the household women who work and have a husband (or companion or mate) contribute disproportionately to housekeeping because the man would incur a utility loss through identity in doing housework. Akerlof and Kranton also categorize \( c_j \) in terms of race and identity: they propose that blacks do not succeed educationally because identity predicated on academic success would be contrary to maximizing utility. One of their conclusions is correspondingly that legal equality or equality of opportunity may not suffice to end racial disparities in market incomes.

**Predetermined or imposed identity**

Gender is predetermined identity. Identities can be imposed, for example, in caste systems in India and elsewhere; blacks have had identity imposed on them; the Jews are a case where identity has at times been imposed.
Choice of identity
Expressive behavior is based on choice of identity. People may chose an identity as sympathetic to victims whoever the victims may be or the identity may require spontaneous sympathy for declared “underdogs”, such as low-income people. People can also choose an identity as perpetual refugees or victims. They may choose to emphasize an identity that was previously imposed and has become voluntary.11 Brennan and Hamlin (2000) describe people as choosing “dispositions”. Lewisch (2004) describes people as choosing identity by choosing “windows” through which to view the world.12

Is expressive behavior rational?
I shall continue with identity as discretionary rather than imposed. We therefore confront the question whether choosing an identity and behaving expressively to confirm the identity is rational. We cannot restrict the scope of the source of personal utility: when people maximize utility with identity in the utility function, behavior is rational with reference to the utility function – although, when behaving expressively, people may be acting contrary to economic self-interest based on a narrow personal cost-benefit calculation, such as when they vote expressively.

A general model of identity and expressive behavior
Identity is often chosen through membership or association with a group, the members of which become the reference for approval. Utility is then obtained through confirmation of identity and from demonstration of identity to group members. The two sources of utility may not be mutually consistent.13 A simple defining framework is an additive utility function for individual j with usual concave properties:

\[ U_j(x_j) = \{B_j(x_j) - C(x_j)\} + \{I(x_j) + S(x_j) - D(x_j)\}, \quad j = 1, \ldots, n \]

\[ = \{\text{non-expressive utility}\} + \{\text{expressive utility}\} \]

Utility thus consists of non-expressive and expressive utility. The choice regarding \( x_j \) can be binary as in whether or not to vote, or may be a choice

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12 “Windows” differ when someone is rolling down a hill in a transparent barrel and another person observes the barrel rolling down the hill. There is nonetheless an objective truth that one person is observing another person in a barrel rolling down a hill – and if the two people switched places they would also switch their “views of the world”. There is no ethics or behavioral choice involved in this example. We leave this example to physics. In the cases relevant for economics, people chose their personal windows.
13 Group membership can also influence preferences. People usually exhibit more empathy with group members. For experimental evidence, see Yan Chen and Sherry Xin Li (2009).
from a continuous variable as how much charity to vote for, given that the individual has decided to vote. In the utility function (3):

- $B_j(x_j)$ is non-expressive benefit
- $C(x_j)$ is non-expressive cost.

In the absence of expressive behavior, there are only these benefits and costs and people make a direct non-expressive personal cost-benefit calculation. If the decision is whether to vote, people would rationally not vote because the expected benefit of being decisive is zero and the time cost of voting is positive. Expressive utility has the following components:

- $I(x_j)$ is utility from expressive behavior through the effect of the decision $x_j$ on one’s own identity.
- $S(x_j)$ is utility from behaving expressively through the effect of the decision $x_j$ on how others in a target group or specified peer group regard individual $j$.\(^{14}\)
- $D(x_j)$ is the cost of expressive behavior, which is incurred in reminding or communicating to others that one has voted for a virtuous outcome. The source of the cost $D(x_j)$ can also be cognitive dissonance: there is cognitive dissonance if utility through $S(x_j)$ in being liked by others is costly in terms of the compromise of utility $I(x_j)$ through self-identity: $D(x_j)$ then indicates the personal loss incurred through cognitive dissonance. The loss is minimal for people who can suppress the internal conflict between their ideal view of themselves and the choices required for social approval.

Thus people derive expressive utility $I$ through identity that allows them to feel good about themselves and through $S$ by being popular or liked by others, but they may incur a cost $D$ in the behavior required to express themselves through identity. The decision regarding $x_j$ can be about voting or market spending that allows expression of environmental awareness. Contributing to financing a public good confirms a cooperative personal nature. The decision may be to contribute to collection action to achieve a political objective or to support a political party or candidate through attending political rallies and demonstrations; declaring support and sympathy for particular groups in conflict situations; or making declarations in the course of conversation or in writing to express sentiments that are of a defining nature with regard to identity. Another case is choice of identity as being a public-choice or political-economy theorist who perceives self-interest as underlying both market decisions and political and bureaucratic behavior; or by choosing a “window” through which self-interest is viewed as limited to market behavior and outside the domain of political and bureaucratic behavior, which allows a nicer and kinder identity than that of the public-choice theorist. The public-

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\(^{14}\) In some cases there may be an attempt to impress not a designated group but everybody – politicians of this genre are known as populists. Economists in general do not attempt to impress everyone simultaneously: they may, for example, tailor their expressive behavior to the reference group of the occasion, as identified by the editorial predispositions of the journal to which they submit their research for publication. Bruno Frey (2004) has described publishing as prostitution because of the required willingness to adapt and compromise to satisfy reviewers’ requisites for recommending publication.
choice theorist or political economist has chosen an identity as describer of real-world attributes that indicate why the actual world may not be ideal. The alternative window focuses on descriptions of socially benevolent political and bureaucratic behavior and allows expression of an identity as a person who associates oneself with the socially benevolent behavior. The debate will be about human nature, or about whether should be – or can be – viewed as nice or not.

Preferences as explanations of behavior
As economists we are reluctant to explain behavior by recourse to preferences. Nonetheless people have preferences over more than consumption. People would for example not vote if all they cared about was consumption, since they could use the time taken to vote to increase leisure or income.

Choosing identity
Choice of identity determines the reference point for people feeling good about themselves and also the reference or peer group from whom approval is sought, and connects utility that people derive from feeling good about themselves with utility from the approval of others. We can describe people as choosing an identity from a set of alternatives \( A = \{A_1, A_2, \ldots, A_I\} \). Here choice is unrestricted. You can be who you want to be, subject to dissonance. Young children are the most uninhibited in this regard when they declare when being told a story or watching a movie that “I am Jack” or “Jill” or some other hero or heroine. People can choose their identity – and convey their identity – through how they dress. In the extreme, people indelibly (almost) tattoo themselves to differentiate their bodies; the identification may be individualistic but is also collective through identification with the category of people who tattoo themselves. Ideology as a focus for choice of identity allows people to choose to belong to a category of people with a particular nature, for example people who describe themselves as charitable and caring. Incorporating dependence of behavior on choice of identity results in:

\[
U_j = U_j[x_j(A_j)], \quad i = 1, \ldots, I; \quad j = 1, \ldots, n. \tag{4}
\]

Choice of an identity as a caring kind person is a self-pleasing identity and is also pleasing others in a reference group composed of people who choose self-pleasing identities. For given choice of identity, the decision regarding \( x_j \) indicates, for example, the extent of redistribution that individual \( j \) declares to be desirable. Since \( x_j \) is a collective decision, actual redistribution is not determined by voting for or declaring oneself to care about people in need: the choice of \( x_j \) is expressive in being self-describing to conform and inform that “I am a kind person who cares about unfortunate people”.

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**Individual differences**

In the utility function (3), people differ in personal benefits and costs $B_j$ and $C_j$ but not in the functions $I$, $S$, and $D$. To account for individual differences, diversity is required in these latter functions. People in particular differ in willingness to incur a utility loss through compromised self-identity in order to gain utility through social or peer approval. We therefore re-express the utility function to include personal weights on utility from own-identity and utility from social approval, and also different personal weights on the costs of being expressive. Then:

$$U_j(x_j|A_j^*) = \{B_j(x_j) - C(x_j)\} + \{\alpha_j I(x_j) + \beta_j S(x_j) - \gamma_j D(x_j)\}, \quad j = 1, \ldots, n. \quad (4)$$

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

We can now distinguish people in terms of utility through sensitivity to how they regard themselves and how others regard them. People for whom $\{\alpha_j = 0, \beta_j > 0\}$ derive no utility from confirming identity. People for whom $\{\alpha_j > 0, \beta_j = 0\}$ do not predicate their behavior on the approval of others and base their behavior on their own identity only. If $\{\alpha_j = 0, \beta_j = 0\}$, behavior is not expressive (and the cost $D$ is not incurred): when behavior is expressive, people for whom $\gamma_j$ is higher experience higher personal cost in communicating their expressive behavior to others or in coping with dissonance between their chosen identity and the identity required for utility from social approval. There are other types of behavior that are expressive but which people do not wish to be revealed. For example, $\{\alpha_j > 0, \beta_j = 0\}$ defines guilt without shame; $\{\alpha_j = 0, \beta_j > 0\}$ defines shame without guilt; and $\{\alpha_j > 0, \beta_j > 0\}$ defines people who experience both guilt and shame.

**Utility-maximizing choice**

In the absence of expressive behavior we have the usual $MB$ and $MC$ equality:

$$B_j(x_j) - C_j(x_j) = 0, \quad j = 1, \ldots, n. \quad (5a)$$

With expressive behavior the usual $MB$ and $MC$ equality expands to:

$$\left( B_j'(x_j) + \alpha_j I'(x_j) + \beta_j S'(x_j) \right) = \left( C_j'(x_j) + \gamma_j D'(x_j) \right), \quad j = 1, \ldots, n. \quad (5b)$$

**Expressive and non-expressive utility**

We now omit the subscript $j$ that indexes individuals and look at the behavior of one individual who has chosen an identity.

**Expressive behavior as reinforcement**

With $x$ continuous and $x^*$ determined by expression (5b), an outcome can have the property that
\[ U(x^*) > 0, \quad B(x^*) - C(x^*) > 0, \quad I(x^*) \geq 0, \quad S(x^*) \geq 0, \quad D(x^*) \geq 0. \quad (6) \]

In such cases, expressive behavior is not necessary for \( x^* \) to be chosen: the utility from expressive behavior reinforces the utility expressed in \([B(x^*) - C(x^*)]\). A person may enjoy reading but may also benefit expressively from the books that he or she reads. Or a person would purchase an environmentally beneficial vehicle without the expressive component of utility. The cost \( D(x) \) is incurred in communicating the expressive behavior to others. In these cases, utility from expressive behavior is a reinforcement for non-expressive choice. Expressive behavior has no consequences other than in determining the utility of the decision maker and when the decision is discrete (whether to read a particular book or to purchase a particular car) is observationally equivalent to non-expressive behavior.

Expressive behavior with personal direct utility loss

Expressive behavior can entail personal direct loss so that:
\[ U(x^*) > 0, \quad B(x^*) - C(x^*) < 0, \quad I(x^*) \geq 0, \quad S(x^*) \geq 0, \quad D(x^*) \geq 0. \quad (7) \]

In such cases, \( x^* \) is chosen because the utility obtained from expressive behavior more than compensates for the direct personal non-expressive loss. Expressive voting is an example with the cost \( D(x) \) incurred in proclaiming: “I voted for generosity” and asking others “did you also vote for generosity?”

Preeminence of social or peer approval

When social or peer approval is preeminent:
\[ U(x^*) > 0, \quad I(x^*) < 0, \quad S(x^*) > 0. \quad (8) \]

People in such cases compromise their own identity in order to gain social or peer approval. Expressive behavior is directed at being liked or approved of by others even if being likeable or approval comes at a cost in terms of disutility of compromised self-identity.\(^{15}\)

\(^{15}\) An example from my own country concerns academics who voice agreement with foreign critics who might deny their right of self-defense in order to gain peer approval among the foreign counterparts. The choice of identity provides utility from \( S(x^*) > 0 \) at the expense of \( I(x^*) < 0 \) by not challenging enmity. Timur Kuran (1995) has written about “private truths and public lies” in the context of preference falsification. In cases where preference falsification is a choice, the falsification can correspond to choice of identity because of utility from approval from peer groups. In other cases to which Kuran refers, preference falsification is a necessity of survival, as when living under totalitarian regimes that obligate adherence to an ideology.
3. TYPES OF EXPRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

Non-expressive voters
Not all voters and not all people are necessarily expressive in the sense described in the models of expressive voting where being expressive is associated with supporting an ethically desirable outcome only when the personal cost is sufficiently low. Rather than all voters being expressive, there may be a majority of expressive voters in an electorate. The majority then votes expressively for income redistribution and a welfare state. The minority of voters proclaims evidence of moral hazard and proposes less generous redistribution with more conditionality on receiving income transfers. The majority would support the minority if members of the expressive majority believed that their individual votes were decisive. However, the expressive majority votes for generosity because of the utility of voting to be generous.

Mutual recrimination
Mutual recrimination make take place. The non-expressive voters may be identified as being on the “right” and the expressive voters as being the “left”. In rhetoric, the right may be accused of having no social conscience because of the vote against generous income transfers. The left may be accused of insensitivity to incentives in downplaying or ignoring moral hazard.

Expressive rhetoric
When there is expressive voting, we can also expect expressive rhetoric. Expressive rhetoric, like expressive voting, provides utility from expression.

Expressive forthright voters
The expressive voters that have been described voted for outcomes that they do not want. They obtained utility from associating themselves with an identity but the utility from association was less than the loss of utility that would be lost if the cost of truly behaving according to the identity had to be incurred. People may also obtain utility from expressing an identity but they may truly seek the outcome for which they voted. In the context of helping others, the latter type of expressive behavior is basically generous (BG) whereas the expressive voters that we described are basically selfish (BS). Hence, in contrast to the description in the model of expressive voting, being expressive to confirm a chosen identity to oneself or to others does not necessarily mean that a person is not forthright.

Non-expressive BG people
Non-expressive BG people want to give charity but would not vote to give charity unless they knew that their vote was decisive in facilitating the outcome in which charity is given.\(^{16}\) They would rationally view voting as

\(^{16}\) Andreoni (1990) refers to non-expressive personal benefit from giving as a “warm glow” effect; some people apparently physically feel such a “glow” when giving.
instrumental. When the probability of being decisive is zero, voters who vote for charity are therefore BS expressive, whereas non-expressive BG people are rationally predicted not to vote. We could conduct the following experiment: tell subjects that their probability of being decisive is zero and offer them the opportunity to vote completely anonymously for charity or to abstain; expressive BS voters will vote for charity and non-expressive BG people will abstain.

**Expressive BG people**
Expressive BG people actually want to give to charity and also obtain utility from expressing themselves as people who are charitable. They differ from BS expressive voters in voting for charity whether they believe that they will be decisive or not. Hence, when voters are observed to vote for charity with the probability of being decisive zero, we do not know if they are BS or BG expressive. As the probability of being decisive increases, voters who are BS expressive will tend not to vote for charity.

**Positive externalities from expressive BG behavior**
Charitable expressive (BG) behavior is the source of positive externalities for the recipients of the charity. To describe a case with positive externalities, I shall be anecdotal. A couple who each had high-paying jobs invited me to join them in a center that catered to people who otherwise would be homeless. The center provided in-kind charity in the form of accommodation and food. The high-income couple personally served cafeteria style lunch to the inhabitants of the center. The behavior might be explained as altruistic or genuinely charitable. However, the assistance could have been provided in terms of money, by paying other people to serve lunch to the inhabitants of the center. Degrees of charity can be ranked, with the highest level of charity being to provide people with means of self-reliance. By paying for others to serve the food, there would be an additional charitable advantage of providing the highest degree of charity by creating jobs for unskilled people and giving such people a sense of self-worth. However, the help was given in-kind by actually serving food cafeteria style to the people in need. The help was at a low level on the scale of charity because the donor knew the recipient and the recipient knew the donor. The behavior of personally serving food to the inhabitants of the center was expressive in being self-defining and also the behavior occurred in the company of like people engaged in the same personal generosity with whom utility could be gained collectively. When asked later where they had spent part of their weekend, they could relate where they had been and what they had done. The kindness and self-sacrifice in their expressive behavior confirmed their identity as charitable. For

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17 Whether they prefer to give charity as a personal act or to be decisive in voting to compel all voters to give charity together with them depends on personal payoffs. They may derive greater utility from being the sole charitable person in a population or form giving when others are giving. In either case they are genuinely charitable and would not vote to give charity if they knew that their vote was not decisive. See Hillman (2009, chapter 7).
considering externalities, information is required about how the recipients of
the charity perceived that their utilities were affected when they served the
food by well-off people, compared to being served food by a paid employee
closer in the social hierarchy to themselves. If the people in the center for the
homeless derived utility from food put on their plates by high-income people,
there was a positive externality from the decision of the high-income people
to come to the center to serve the food. The expressive behavior described
here differs from expressive voting in that generosity was personally
manifested in behavior: the expressive component was in the means chosen
for the expressive behavior of the personal act of putting food on the plates of
the poor and not paying to have others serve the food.18

**Negative externalities from expressive BG behavior**
Expressive BG behavior can have negative externalities for others than the
direct beneficiaries of charity and sympathy. There is moral hazard if the
people waiting to fed could have been self-reliant. In poor countries buying
trinkets from children who should be in school provides the incentive not to
be in school.

Table 2: The exploitation of BG expressive behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The recipient exerts effort to be self-reliant</th>
<th>The recipient does not exert effort to be self-reliant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The donor does not give</td>
<td>2, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The donor gives</td>
<td>4, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3, 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The negative externalities of expressive BG behavior were note by
James Buchanan (1975) in his “Samaritan’s” dilemma: in table 2, which sets
out the dilemma, the Nash equilibrium is (3,4) where the donor gives and the
recipient is not self-reliant. If the decision is made collectively and is binding,
potential donors or taxpayers who are non-expressive and do not behave
according to the payoffs in table 2 cannot enforce an outcome in which the
recipient exerts effort to be self-reliant. Non-expressive behavior is shown in
figure 3: with the recipient choosing a maxi-min strategy, the equilibrium is

18 Guilt may also have been involved: is the expressive behavior of personally serving the
food a means of expiating the guilt of having been more successful in life than the people to
whom the food was served?
(3,3) where the recipient exerts effort to be self-reliant and the donor provides supplement assistance.  

Table 3: Non-expressive behavior by the donor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The donor</th>
<th>The recipient exerts effort to be self-reliant</th>
<th>The recipient does not exert effort to be self-reliant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The donor does not give</td>
<td>2, 2</td>
<td>4, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The donor gives</td>
<td>3, 3</td>
<td>1, 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE ON EXPRESSIVE VOTING

Non-expressive people would not rationally vote if they did not believe that there was a significant likelihood that their vote will be decisive. Expressive BS and BG people are predicted to vote whether they believe that their vote will be decisive or not. How BS expressive people vote is contingent on whether they expect their vote to be decisive.

Expressive voting and distance from ideal policies

The view of voting as instrumental or a means to achieve an end predicts that people maximize utility by voting for the candidate who is closest to their ideal among policy alternatives (although based on a personal cost-benefit evaluation where the cost is time and the benefit is through the expectation of being decisive, people should rationally not vote). Expressive voters in contrast care about the distance between their ideal policy and the policy position taken by candidates. Guttman et al (1994) used survey data to investigate reasons for how people voted and found that distance from the ideal did matter, indicating expressive voting.

19 See Hillman (2009, chapter 7).

20 Because the sample consisted of people who voted, abstention could not be part of the study. Expressive voting predicts that people abstain when the distance between their preferred policy and the declared policies of candidates is too great, or when the candidates’ attributes differ too much from voters’ ideal attributes. People who abstain tend to declare that “I have no one to vote for”, which confirms expressive voting. On abstention and expressive voting, see Brennan and Hamlin (1998) and Hillman (2009, chapter 6).
Voting at the College of the Holy Cross
Carter and Guerette (1992) reported on the outcome of asking students from economics and accounting classes at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester in the U.S. state of Massachusetts to choose between voting for charity and voting for money for themselves subject to different probabilities being a decisive voter. The hypothesis of expressive voting would be confirmed if the propensity of the students to vote for money for themselves rather than for charity increased as the probability of being decisive increased. The sums in the experiment were $2 for charity as against alternatives of $6 or $9 personal money for a student. Carter and Guerette declared that there was only “weak support” for the BS expressive-voting hypothesis. For example, when the choices were between $9 for themselves and $2 for charity, “most surprisingly, only two of eight subjects voted for the cash when their votes were certain to be decisive” (italics added). The voting decisions are understandable in terms of expressive behavior of BG people. Students at the College of the Holy Cross seemed to have been expressing their identity as charitable in continuing to vote for charity as the probability of being decisive increased. We might therefore conclude that students at the College of the Holy Cross were BG expressive. They may have sought the opportunity to be decisive in the giving of charity. If the students were influenced by the ethics underlying the principles of their college and obtained utility from being expressive, they would as BG expressive vote for charity over personal benefit as an expressive act. The students may have wished actually to give to charity but they were unable to give and the best they could do was to vote for charity.

Conformity and expressive voting
Tyran (2004) reported outcomes for two types of experiments (or treatments). In both cases students from the universities of St Gallen in Switzerland and Innsbruck in Austria confronted different probabilities of being decisive. The students were also asked to predict the outcome of the vote in the different cases. In a first treatment T1, all voters donated to charity if there was a majority in favor of donating. In the second treatment T2, only the voters who voted in favor of charity actually donated to charity if there was a majority in favor of donating. In the latter case T2, it was costly to vote for charity if a student believed that a majority would favor charity. In the former case T1, the cost of voting for charity was low: students could be expressive in voting for charity because, if they believed that there was a majority in favor of charity, they would have to pay whether or not they voted in favor. Tyran reported “bandwagon effects”; that is, students appeared to conform in their voting decisions with how they expected others to vote. If voting was expressive, the students who participated in T1 were predicted to vote for charity more so than the students who participated in T2 but Tyran did not

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21 For such a model of strategic behavior, see Hillman (2009, chapter 7).
22 Carter and Guerette in their conclusions recognized that true charitable intentions would have had a “confounding” effect on the results of their experiments.
find this to be the case.23 Tyran interpreted the results as evidence against expressive voting of the BS type and as supporting existence of motives of conformity (“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”). We might propose a relation between bandwagon effects and expressive voting: a person who conforms by voting the same way as he or she expects others to vote does not anticipate being a decisive voter. In T1, a voter anticipating not being decisive would nonetheless pay if the majority was generous and would incur disutility from feeling that he or she had resisted charity but had been obliged to give in any event. An expressive voter of the BS type would therefore vote in favor if a majority in favor were anticipated unless the BS type believed that he or she would be decisive in blocking the vote for charity. In T2 with a majority anticipated in favor of giving, an expressive BS voter would vote against giving charity and an expressive BG voter would vote in favor. The absence of a significant difference between the T1 and T2 treatments indicated the students who voted for charity were principally expressive BG rather expressive BS types.24 Tyran sought to eliminate feelings of ethically appropriate behavior by not informing the students of the ethical implications of their decisions. Nonetheless we have to suppose that the students understood that they were being confronted with choices in which ethics were involved. The students voted when they could not be decisive and hence voted expressively. In their expressive voting, they could choose the identity of a charitable (BG) or basically selfish (BS) person contingent on their expectations of the identity that they believed a majority would choose. The expressive BG students would feel their identity had been compromised and would incur disutility if in T1 they voted against giving but were compelled by a majority to give; similarly in T2 the BG expressive students would incur disutility if they voted against giving and a majority voted in favor and actually gave while they themselves did not give. The conformity was in the introspection among the BG students that a majority of other students were of their type.

**Large sums**

If the sums of money were to change, we would expect behavior to change. If the Holy Cross students were offered not $9 for themselves but $900 against $2 for charity, they would almost certainly have voted for the $900 for themselves – and they could have expressed their BG nature by donating for than $2 to charity.25 In Tyran’s experiments, the students’ stake was the

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23 Tyran’s subjects were less generous overall than the students from the College of the Holy Cross,: 46% always voted not to give and 40% were BS expressive in responding to the probability of being decisive, while the remaining 14% always voted to give.

24 “...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.” (p1652)

25 Carter and Guerette note that this is a rational decision by students – but on the other hand they also proposed that the option of personally giving charity from the larger personal sum received as “rationalizing” a vote for personal money.
equivalent of $6 plus $3 for predicting the vote for the majority, again small sums. In another experiment, Fischer (1996) offered students the possibility of obtaining a larger sum of personal money ($200) through majority voting and reported that voting was influenced by the probability of being decisive and hence was BS-expressive. Fischer also reported that voting for charity increased when voting was observed by others, indicating the presence of the social approval $S(x)$ motive.

5. EXPRESSIVE BEHAVIOR IN OTHER EXPERIMENTS

Outcomes of experiments on expressive voting can be interpreted as revealing expressive behavior wherein people confirm a charitable identity. Expressive behavior explains outcomes observed in other experiments.

Prisoners’ dilemma
In the single-interaction prisoners’ dilemma, it is rational behavior not to cooperate. Yet often in experiments large numbers of subjects do cooperate and thereby achieve the efficient symmetric outcome. If people have cooperated, perhaps they have the payoffs of the prisoners’ dilemma and presume a social norm of cooperation. Alternatively, the payoffs perceived may be amended beyond the material payoffs of the prisoners’ dilemma so that people may obtain utility expressively through confirming their identity as cooperative and incur disutility if they behave to exploit the good will of others. When playing against a similarly expressive person, two people cooperate and obtain the efficient outcome, based on rational behavior given their preferences that include identity. If an expressive cooperative person meets a person with the material payoffs of the prisoners’ dilemma, the expressive cooperative person is exploited. In a repeated game, the expressive cooperative person may punish by not cooperating. The utility function is extended to include the behavior of the second player – whose behavior in not reciprocally cooperative may be regarded as an affront to civility. People care about the response of others to their own expressive behavior; they expect to be liked for their cooperative behavior and become indignant if their nice behavior is exploited rather than reciprocated. No punishment occurs, however, if the expressive person’s identity includes non-vindictiveness. We can infer from the outcome of experiments how people view their identities and whether they behave expressively, and how people react when their being nice results in insult when generosity is not reciprocated.

The public good game
The public good game is a variation on a theme of the prisoners’ dilemma.

The trust game
The trust game has similarities to the prisoners’ dilemma, in the sense that cooperation based on material gain in the prisoners’ dilemma can be predicated on “trusting other people to cooperate”; however, in the prisoners’
dilemma, rational behavior based on material gain is not to cooperate. Expressive behavior leads to decisions to cooperate in the now no-longer prisoners’ dilemma. In the trust game, the expressive behavior of the donor is “I am a trusting person” and the expressive behavior of the recipient is “I am a trustworthy person”. The equilibrium based on material gain is the inefficient outcome in which that no money is transferred. The interesting experiment is to allow an expressive donor to continue to make transfers when donors do not return money. How long will the originally expressive donor continue to remain expressive. That depends, we would imagine, on the cost of remaining expressively “a trusting person” when trust is not reciprocated.

**Ultimatum and dictatorship games**
Outcomes in ultimatum games incorporate the role of animosity. Animosity through perceptions of unfairness is expressed in rejection of offers deemed unreasonable when the cost of rejecting an offer is sufficiently low in terms of the sum foregone. In dictatorship games people directly express their identity through charitable giving.

**Economics students**
Economics students often behave differently from other students in being “rational” in public-good (or prisoners’-dilemma) games. Economics students may tend to have an identity as rational and profit-seeking, and as being competitive rather than cooperative. Other students may have an identity more attuned to being a nice cooperative person who does not take advantage of the good will of others. Such students may continue to cooperate in a repeated game when others do not cooperate because of the utility from confirming how much nicer they are than others. When economics students are introduced to the prisoners’ dilemma, they are not only explained 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. Hence the question in less about whether there has been self-selection among economics and business students than the consequences of being taught a model based on material rewards with no expressive content.

**The cost of being expressive**
The sums of money involved in the experiments in general do not impose a high cost on confirmation of identity as being a nice person or confirming identity to others. The students who are the subjects will often spend as much on lunch as is lost in experiments in which they expressively confirm their identity. The students also in general come from middle and high-income families. Because lower-income households are underrepresented in higher education, a low marginal utility of income reduces the utility value of the money that is foregone in order to behave expressively. There is a supposition in the experimental economics literature that the amount of money involved
does not matter. This is a supposition that experimental economics would like to see vindicated because of the justification provided for small sums of money in experiments. In the choice between behaving expressively and behavior based on material gain alone, the cost of behaving expressively matters. The utility from identity based on “I am a nice person who always cooperates” is contingent on the loss incurred or the personal cost of confirming self-identity. Wealth matters. Conformation of self-identity is a normal good with respect to wealth. In any experiment, the question is how much is lost relative to wealth and income outside the experiment, or how much is gained. Wealthy and high-income people can better afford the cost of expressive behavior.

PART 2:

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF EXPRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

2.1 INCOME AND EXPRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

*How does income affect expressive behavior?*

People from high-income families may choose to wear frayed clothing of the sort that poor people in the past were compelled to wear. In wearing the frayed clothing, the people with high incomes identify with low-income people by showing solidarity and empathy. The cost of the expressive frayed clothing is higher than usual clothing. The extra cost is incurred because the designer clothing requires strategically placed holes and tears. When clothing falls in price to become affordable to all but the poorest of poor, low-income people wear non-frayed clothing and some high-income people buy and wear frayed clothing. By wearing the frayed clothing, high-income people express their identity to themselves and do so visibly to others.

*Income and voting*

The evidence has indicated that high-income people have in general exhibited a higher propensity to vote than low-income people; the opposite is predicted to be the case because the value of time of high-income people is presumably greater than that of low-income people. When we introduce expressive behavior, there is no paradox with regard to different voting turnouts of high and low-income voters. If being expressive is a normal good, the probability of voting increases with income, and high-income people are therefore more likely to vote than low-income people. High-income more expressive or

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26 See Frey (1971).
being expressive is a normal good if low-income people identify less with the society in which they live than do high-income people.

Expressive behavior and the candidates
From the perspective of expressive voting and behavior, a candidate who allows low-income people to express themselves will result in low-income people voting in large numbers – which was the case in the 2008 U.S. Presidential election. Voting in the election was expressive. Because of the large turnout, the cost of voting in terms of time was high in many locations where people waited hours in line to vote. The high turnout of low-income people could be explained in terms of lower value of time because of the time required in order to vote. However, both high and low-income people voted for the candidate who at one point expressively declared that “the time has come to spread the wealth”. Both high and low-income people voted for the same candidate. We observe that in many democracies high-income people support the party of the “left”, including the Democratic Party in the U.S. and the Labor Party in Australia, Israel and the U.K. High-income high-caste academics from India have often supported the left-leaning Congress Party.

The motive for being expressive again
It merits reiteration that expressive behavior is based on being liked, by oneself and by others. There are traits that make people likeable to themselves and to others. Nice people in particular care about people who are in unfortunate circumstances and express the desirability of assistance to such people. Through expressive behavior, people are accepted into the company of others who likewise express sensitivity to the needs of the unfortunate.

2.2 EXPRESSIVE BEHAVIOR AND INFORMATION

Life with an identity
An identity is chosen for expressive behavior because of the higher utility of active association rather than maintaining objectivity or neutrality. Through identification, the individual becomes an active participant in life. He or she takes sides. Life is then more interesting. Some people do not like to identify with losers and want to associate themselves only with a winning side. Others obtain utility from identification with the weaker side, based on the higher utility that they will obtain if the “underdog” is successful. When the underdog changes, they also change their identity for expressive behavior.27

27 A movie that wins multiple prizes can be used as representative of what people like, or like to identify with. The movie Slumdog Millionaire won 8 prizes in the Oscar ceremonies on February 22 2009. A movie that wins this many Oscars must be special, no matter what we may think of the genre. The movie allows viewers to identify with a slum dweller who improbably wins a quiz contest because of selective information that he has acquired in the course of an underprivileged life: against all reasonable odds, the hero knows the answers to
Rational ignorance
Expressive behavior does not require knowing facts or truth. Indeed, when behavior is expressive, knowing the facts or truth can only be a prospective source of disutility. A child who declares “I am a cat” does not want to be told that he or she is not a cat. Expressive behavior is therefore reason for rational ignorance. In its usual guise, rational ignorance describes the rationality of not knowing because the personal costs of acquiring information exceed the personal benefits. When behavior is expressive through choice of identity, ignorance is rational because knowledge introduces the potential for dissonance. An individual might expressively derive utility through an identity of being supportive of a group of people because they have low incomes; the revelation of moral hazard as underlying sympathy-evoking behavior would then diminish the utility from expressive behavior. Or a person may derive utility from an identity of feeling sorry for “refugees”; the information that the “refugees” have been attracted by the benefits of being refugees and are in fact voluntary emigrants can only diminish expressive utility. We should therefore not expect to be able readily to change expressive behavior through demonstration of facts.

Political correctness as protector of expressive utility
Utility from expressive behavior is protected by political correctness. “You are not allowed to say that” is the means of defense of the expressive utility. The evidence is for example that foreign aid is ineffective in helping poor people in poor countries. Nonetheless the ineffective aid continues to be given. The donors are BG (and not BS) since they actually give aid. They are expressive in that they derive expressive utility from giving the ineffective aid. The donors do not want to know that their aid is ineffective. The mantras include “from here we shall defeat poverty”. A stream of academic writing indicates how aid can in principle be beneficial. The predominant reason for ineffectiveness of aid is corrupt government; the evidence is conclusive that corruption prevents aid resources from reaching the poor in poor countries who are the intended beneficiaries. Given the evidence, the utility from giving aid can only be BG expressive. A Harvard professor active in the aid industry has nonetheless declared at a conference that: “I believe that corruption is overrated”.

Opinion and fact
Utility from expressive behavior is defended by converting facts to opinion. For example, evidence that moral hazard underlies low incomes of parts of the quiz questions, thereby winning the money and also the girl. Some people identify with the girl. The movie is about a miracle – defined as the realization of a very low probability event. There are positive externalities from the movie because viewers are made happy. Yet the movie is close to science fiction in the objective probability that the hero would know the answers to the questions in the quiz. The negative externality from the expressive behavior is that some children may be led to believe that becoming wealthy through luck rather effort at learning has a higher probability than is in fact the case.
the population in rich countries is converted to opinion to allow continued expressive utility by identification with low-income people. The mantra when the topic of moral hazard is raised is “unfortunate people should be helped”. Political correctness is associated with “opinion”: the bounds imposed by political correctness relegate facts to opinion. Truth has no place when people expressively propagate their own truths to support their utility from expressive behavior. The defensive structure of political correctness and recourse to opinion rather than acceptance of facts is the basis for a position that “nothing that you say will change my mind”. A change of mind would be costly in terms of expressive utility lost.

**Moral relativism**

Like political correctness, moral relativism protects utility from expressive behavior.\(^{28}\) Moral relativism allows everyone to obtain expressive utility based on their own standards – or own beliefs. No one need feel disadvantaged or diminished because of behavior. As said the dodo in Alice in Wonderland about the outcome of the race: `Everybody has won, and all must have prizes.'\(^{29}\)

**Personal experience**

Sufficiently salient personal experience can change expressive behavior. Another anecdote illustrates. In the early 1970s, a fellow student in graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania introduced me to American political distinctions. Liberals were caring people who were tolerant of others (as distinct from European liberals who valued personal freedom over imposed order). Conservatives were self-interested and thereby intolerant of the consequences of their self-interested behavior for others. Conservatives sought to protect their wealth attained through privilege and also maintained prejudices against minorities. The student lived not far from campus in an inner city area. One day his wife was molested; thereafter he and his wife moved to the suburbs and at the same time conservative principles displaced the former liberal principles in expressive behavior. The former liberal tolerance was replaced by declarations of ingratitude of those toward whom feelings of equality and fraternity had previously been expressed. Fear and mistrust replaced equanimity and indifferent regarding race. The initial choice for location of housing had been expressive. Personal experience revealed that the costs of being expressive through location were too high.\(^{30}\)

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\(^{28}\) Moral relativism is the position that ethics and morality are judged with reference to standards that people or societies determine for themselves.

\(^{29}\) The continuation: “‘But who is to give the prizes?’ quite a chorus of voices asked. ‘Why, she, of course,’ said the Dodo, pointing to Alice with one finger; and the whole party at once crowded round her, calling out in a confused way, ‘Prizes! Prizes!’”

\(^{30}\) An expressive response to terror is to emphasize with the terrorists and to plead for discourse that will identity and then resolve the issues that lead the terrorists to commit their acts of terror. The empathy with terrorists may be based on guilt because of belief that the terrorists are protesting low incomes: of course, 16 of the 19 terrorists of September 11 2001 in the U.S. came from oil-rich Saudi Arabia and all were from well-endowed families but as
2.3 THE EXTERNALITIES OF EXPRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

Positive and negative externalities
Expressive behavior is the source of positive externalities when BG people act expressively and do something that brings benefit to others. However, BS expressive behavior has negative externalities. The negative externalities are present in expressive voting when people vote expressively for an outcome that they would veto.

Exploitation of expressive behavior
Negative externalities of both BG and BS expressive behavior because of failure to internalize consequences for incentives of others. The window through which people express their identity may require that they be more generous to people who suffer more. The incentive is then to suffer in order to benefit – there is moral hazard. In the most blatant cases in some societies children are blinded and maimed to become more profitable beggars: the source of profit is BG expressive behavior: the children are worth more maimed or blind because BG expressive people give more money to the blinded and maimed children. If people living in poverty is sufficient to attract foreign aid that can be appropriated, there is no incentive for rulers to allow people to lift themselves out of poverty: again there is moral hazard.

Ideology
Expressive behavior is intertwined with ideology: at the heart of ideological debate is the nature of people and the scope of moral hazard. Are people unfortunate because of the incentive to be unfortunate (or the incentive provided by others to make themselves unfortunate) or are they unfortunate because they are victims of fate in circumstances that have been no fault of their own?

Different windows
The choice of the windows that provide the personal views though which people express their identities provides stereotyped predicted conclusions. The windows are framing devices: some observers see and describe people who suffer; other observers see and describe people who are not self-reliant or who have been made not self-reliant because of incentives. Economics students who have studied endogeneity of behavior through incentives and observed facts that would diminish utility from expressive behavior cannot be readily be communicated because of the loss in expressive utility from accepting the facts. People who have been victims of terror or have been threatened by terror are less able to obtain expressive utility from empathy with terrorists. The expressive behavior of the apologists for terror is of the BS type: the basic selfishness is in not internalizing the threat of terror and in not studying the declarations and motives of the terrorists but rather projecting own images of amenability to discourse and readiness for compromise onto terrorists. For non-expressive expositions on terror, see Bernholz (2004), Murawiec (2008).
moral hazard may seem callous to others who have thought about moral hazard in pointing to the exploitation of predictable expressive behavior.

**Asymmetries in opportunities for expressive behavior**
The opportunities for utility from expressive behavior are asymmetric. There is greater scope for utility from expressive behavior in leaving out consequences for incentives and moral hazard or denying that moral hazard is present. A focus on how incentives can be changed to make self-reliance worthwhile is inconsistent with expressive utility from taking the moral high ground of unreserved sympathy. Concern about moral hazard may be equated with being cynical with regard to human nature. A view that “people are nice and you are cynical in imputing moral hazard to unfortunate people” is expressive: the expressive statement being made is that “I am nice; and I do not attribute exploitative motives to unfortunate people”.

**Expressive behavior and victims**
Through moral hazard, expressive behavior creates victims. Once the victims have been identified, ideology and political correctness protect the utility obtained from expressive behavior: it is forbidden to speak badly of the victims. If victims are viewed as exogenously inevitably so through fate and not endogenously through their own actions, there is nothing that can be done for the victims, except to be charitable toward them. Denying moral hazard thus diminishes the self-worth of the victims – but elevates those who derive expressive utility through sympathy. Once the victims of fate are identified, anyone who does not sympathize with the victims may be labeled as callous – and perhaps as deserving of condemnation or victimization themselves: hence the negative externalities. Guilt in having being successful is a basis for sympathy for the view that less successful people are exogenous victims of fate: if all has always gone well for the successful people, the least they can do out of gratitude is to identify with the unfortunate.31

**International relations and soft power**
Soft power is a concept suggesting that problems in international relations are resolvable through gentle persuasion that ends adversarial conflict by appeal to rationality and a sense of justice and conscience. The claim that soft power can be effective in resolving conflict is an instance of expressive behavior. Those who do not perceive themselves to be threatened act expressively in proclaiming the effectiveness of soft power and derive utility by advocating unilateral non-adversarial methods of conflict resolution. If themselves physically threatened the power that they might use to defend themselves might not be soft.

31 In the aftermath of September 11 in the U.S., there was expressive behavior in blaming the victims; blaming the perpetrators required blaming people who were less unfortunate than the people whom they murdered. There is a personal window through which September 11 has been viewed as the consequence of humiliation of the less fortunate.
Expressive participation in demonstrations and protests

Economic theory encounters difficulty in explaining why people participate in demonstrations and protests. Rationally people should choose to free ride when confronting the prisoners’ dilemma of deciding whether to participate.32 There is a clear analogue to the paradox of voting; just as one vote cannot be expected to decisive, the participation of one individual at a demonstration cannot be expected to be significant. If participation in demonstrations provides expressive utility, we have the additional source of personal benefit that explains the participation. BG expressive people participate in demonstrations because they sincerely wish to achieve an outcome that they believe to be desirable; BS expressive people obtain expressive utility by identifying with objectives that they would veto if decisive. For example, in previous times, they have participated in demonstrations that sought unilateral disarmament in the conformation between western democracies and communism. In such instances ideology was clearly linked to expressive behavior. In present times ideological positions underlie demonstrations against the World Bank or IMF and blame international markets for environmental degradation, diminished biodiversity, and for inadequate labor standards including child labor – rather than the governments in low-income countries whose policies protect neither the environment nor animals nor children. The information that not international markets but the policies of governments are the reasons for the outcomes to which the protestors object would diminish or end their utility from expressive behavior. The expressive behavior of protesting against the international institutions’ support for open markets and discipline in government spending is of the BS type. BG expressive behavior requires protesting against foreign governments whose policies allow harm to the environment, biodiversity, and children.

2.4 EXPRESSIVE BEHAVIOR AND PUBLIC POLICY

A number of critical public policy issues are influenced by expressive behavior. I have alluded to a number of these issues. The policy issues are:

- The welfare state
- Foreign aid
- Immigration of non-productive populations
- Indifference to demographic contestability.

Expressive behavior and the welfare state

Charity and income redistribution have been the background for descriptions and experiments relating to expressive voting. The welfare state is the institutional basis for charity and redistribution within a society: sustaining a welfare state requires that there be limited moral hazard or that the presence

of social insurance does not change norms of behavior from a work ethic to reliance on income transfers. There is evidence that social norms change when income is provided contingent on not working.\textsuperscript{33}

The northern European welfare states
The primary domain of the welfare state has been Protestant northern Europe, where high per capita incomes have in the past been sustained notwithstanding the high tax rates that have financed the welfare state; the welfare state has continued in place without regard for the party in government. The puzzle is the ostensibly limited moral hazard that allowed persistence of the northern European welfare state: why have people remained personally productive when personal material reward was substantially detached from personal effort and contribution? Max Weber proposed that Protestant societies have a work ethic because of religion: that is, people have an identity as self-reliant. The foundation proposed for the Protestant work ethic is the belief that although salvation and damnation are predetermined, success or failure in this life is an indicator of the individual’s predetermined fate. Individuals should therefore be unwilling to reveal their lack of personal success by accepting charity and there should therefore be no moral hazard.\textsuperscript{34} Nor should social norms of self-reliance change. The welfare state should then survive.\textsuperscript{35}

Evidence from tax evasion
Evidence suggests a large magnitude of tax evasion and size of the shadow economy in the welfare states: tax evasion is consistent with the identity expressed through adherence to a work ethic. High taxes do not deter people with a work ethic from working but may deter them from paying all the taxes that are due.

Intergenerational transmission of identity
The identity of behaving according to work ethic need not be based on adherence to a belief system but is sustainable at least for some generations through intra-family cultural transmission: the children observe the parents following a work ethic and do likewise.

\textsuperscript{33} Lindbeck, Nyberg and Weibull (1999) modeled changes in norms of behavior. Brinig and Buckley (1999) note evidence of changes of social norms regarding welfare dependence in the U.S.
\textsuperscript{34} Communism viewed religious precepts as sustaining the divine right of kings to rule and thereby sustaining subordination and repression. Capitalism according to this view kept people poor and submissive – and exploited – but through religion people were given the compensation of hope for a better personal outcome in the next life. Religion was therefore “the opiate of the masses”.
\textsuperscript{35} The variants of Protestantism differ according to the expositor. Luther proposed a work ethic as a reaction to the scholastic ideal of what he viewed as idle contemplation. Every person had an assigned productive role in society. The roles are fixed – there was no envisioned social mobility. However, all work, no matter the nature of the work, had equal merit. Calvin reinforced the work ethic through the doctrine of predetermination.
Guilt and expressive behavior

People who are revealed by their abilities and outcomes in life to be successful may feel guilt that others have not been revealed to be similarly successful. The guilt is assuaged by expressive behavior, including expressive voting in favor of generosity toward the less fortunate. The expressive behavior can be basically generous (welfare state also give high levels of foreign aid) or basically selfish when the utility is from expression only.

Expressive behavior and foreign aid

If identity is expressively sustained by helping victims, the expressive behavior would call for helping victims everywhere. The welfare states indeed are correspondingly generous with foreign aid. Aid has however been ineffective in helping the poor in poor countries. Effectiveness of aid in helping the poor would require the cooperation of the recipient governments in poor countries but aid is used for privileged personal benefit rather than for poor in poor countries intended recipients. The ineffectiveness of the aid is well-documented and we would presume therefore well-known. Yet declarations of the need for aid continue to be made and the aid continues to be given. Utility is expressive through the act of giving: the expressive utility does not depend on the consequences of giving. The expressiveness is thus indicated by giving aid in the knowledge that the aid does not reach the intended beneficiaries. The mantra is: “We gave the money. We showed that we care”. There is further expressive behavior when governments in aid-recipient countries are not blamed for corruption and appropriation of aid resources and absence of cynicism in attributing intentions to others, in particular governments. It is politically incorrect to challenge “the good that government can do”. If governments in poor countries are not to be assigned blame for the ineffectiveness of foreign aid, expressive behavior requires seeking other causes: geography is therefore blamed, or most incongruously insufficient aid. It is expressive to blame inadequate aid resources. The expressive behavior has associated terminology: countries that are not developing are called “developing countries” and aid recipients are referred to “low-income countries” rather than to the poor in poor countries.

Expressive behavior and non-productive immigration

Immigrants are disadvantaged by lack of local language skills and perhaps education; the anticipation is that the refugees and certainly their children will over time integrate economically and become productive members of the

37 There is substantial literature on the corruption. See for example the papers in Abed and Gupta (2002). For a case study see Reimkka and Svensson (2004). The evidence on corruption and appropriation did not prevent dismissal of corruption by a professor from Harvard at a conference dismissing the conclusions of a paper about corruption with: “I think corruption is overrated”. This expressive rhetoric confirms an identity based on personal benevolence.
society that has given them refuge. Such was the case historically with previous migrations. The anticipated economic integration does not take place if the immigrants do not have a work ethic; in the absence of self-reliance, immigrants become dependents of the state. The immigrants’ children may not respond to affirmative action programs that are designed to compensate for unequal educational and family beginnings. Other aspects of the immigrants’ home culture may remain embedded in the immigration population, for example in treatment of women. Immigrants who do not become self-reliant are less well off than the mainstream of the host population. The immigrants may come from hierarchically structured societies with little or no social mobility and have neither a tradition nor expectation of social mobility in their new location. In their former home countries, privileged ruling classes and elites may have dispensed some charity. Their cultural priors are sustained by the charity of the state in their new location. Such observations threaten the utility from expressive behavior that is proposes ongoing income support for immigrant populations that remain unproductive – on the grounds that the immigrants are victims.39

PART 3

EXPRESSIVE BEHAVIOR IN ACADEMIA

Public choice and expressive behavior
Public choice was distinguished by declaring that self-interest also applies outside of market decisions. In consequence of attributing self-interest outside of the market, public choice denied the necessary of virtue of political and bureaucratic decision makers and thereby of government. By threatening utility from expressive behavior, the public choice school imposed a negative externality on adherents to the neo-classical theme. The expressive defense was: “If I were making decisions using the authority of government, I would benevolently pursue the public interest: I would not apply the same self-interest than I apply in my personal market decisions to decisions that I would make as a political decision maker.” Projection is present in: “People are in general benevolent and nice like me – and government controlled by people like me could only be benevolent”. Benevolent government would also not respond to rent seeking, and the behavioral phenomenon of rent seeking met with limited acceptance when first formulated.40 The expressive defense is again through projection: “I would never engage in rent seeking to seek privileged benefit from political decision makers and as a political decision maker I would never grant the privileged favors sought by rent seekers.” Utility from the expressive behavior is diminished by pointing to selective

beneficiaries of political decisions – as Gordon Tullock (1988) and other public choice scholars did.

**The political economy of protection and expressive economics**

When I began my career as an academic economist, the received explanation was that protectionist policies were the socially beneficial outcome of governments making policy decisions in a second-best world. The expositors were expressive: the virtue of the model builders was reflected in the benevolence of the governments that were modeled. Some little time further along, another source of the second-best government benevolence was identified; it was proposed that in imperfectly competitive world markets “strategic trade policy” could increase social welfare if governments gave tax-financed subsidies to domestic firms. My own view (Hillman, 1982, 1989), shared by research colleagues (for example Cassing and Hillman, 1986; Hillman and Ursprung, 1988), was that political decisions about international trade policy were the outcome of political decisions by political decision makers who were influenced by considerations of political support, which in turn depended on protectionist rents and income distribution. The political-economy view seemed when this perspective was initiated politically incorrect; the view if broadly accepted would diminish the utility from expressive behavior of the proponents of models in which governments were socially benevolent and only solely efficiency objectives, and political decision makers were impervious to income distribution, rent creation and extraction, and political support.41

**Why did expressive voting emanate in public choice?**

Expressive voting emanated as a public choice concept, with Buchanan and Tullock and subsequent impetus provided by Geoffrey Brennan and others. We know that voting is problematical because of inefficiencies of outcomes of majority voting, problems of stability, and the injustices that can be the consequences of the majority making decisions that bind on the minority of voters. The problems are ameliorated by checks and balances and common values and culture that result in identities of small groups blended into new common principles that are protected. Nonetheless collective decision making results in problems that do not arise when personal decisions are made in markets. Expressive voting and more generally expressive behavior enhance the case for the individual making personal decisions in markets compared to collective decisions made by voting. When voting is BS expressive, collective decisions through voting fare even worse than anticipated because of the negative externalities that voters impose on one another in expressively voting for outcomes that they would veto if they could.

41 Political economy in international trade policy became consensual in the literature by the mid-1990s.
4. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Expressive behavior appears broadly present in economics and politics. In behaving expressively, people can be basically generous or selfish. In either case, there are in general negative externalities. Perhaps not much can be done about expressive behavior – other than to recognize that people are behaving expressively. Communication regarding expressive behavior will be blocked when, to protect the utility from confirmation of identity, facts are transposed to opinion. Telling people that they are expressive is not expressive because being expressive in order to achieve social approval or to be liked requires consenting to, and not undermining the foundations of utility from expressive behavior.

References


