REVISIONIST PUBLIC CHOICE THEORY*

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* This paper owes much to discussion with several audiences including the World Public Choice Societies Meetings, Amsterdam, March 2007, and to comments from Tom Christiano, Leonard Dudley and Russell Hardin.

Introduction

In a recent essay Christiano coined a distinction between 'mainstream' and 'revisionist' rational choice political theory, and cast us in the role of revisionist theorists[1]. While we disagree with some aspects of Christiano's argument[2], we broadly accept our designated role as revisionist public choice theorists. The major purposes of this brief essay are to provide a summary statement of the revisionist position as we see it, and to sketch what we see as the advantages of this position over its more mainstream alternative.

One preliminary terminological note requires some attention. While Christiano refers to 'rational choice political theory', in this essay we will use the term 'public choice theory'. However, we do not intend this use of terms to indicate a distinction. Indeed for the purposes of this discussion, we take the two phrases to be interchangeable. We believe that the choice between 'rational choice political theory' and 'public choice theory' is more a matter of identifying the audience than it is identifying either methodological or substantive distinctions[3].

A central point of relevance in relation to public choice theory concerns the specification of the content of the idea of rationality. In Christiano's terminology, with which we have no argument, mainstream rational choice theory

> '…adheres strictly to the thesis of *homo economicus*. In other words, it explains the operation of institutions and justifies the reform of those institutions under the assumption that individuals normally maximise their own utility in every action they undertake.' (Christiano, 'Is Normative Rational Choice Theory Self-Defeating?' p123).

The identification of utility maximisation with *homo economicus* conflates two distinguishable aspects of the *homo economicus* notion – one referring to the idea of utility maximisation (or the broader structure of rationality) and the other to the precise content of utility functions (or the specific content of rationality). Nevertheless, we broadly accept the charge that the mainstream public choice position is one that emphasises a relatively narrow conception of self-interest as motivating choice in the political as well as the economic domain. By contrast, revisionist public choice theory seeks to move away from the strict conception of *homo economicus,* and this movement operates in several dimensions. We will focus on three of these dimensions – one relating directly to the content of rational desires and challenging the primacy of narrow self-interest; a second relating to the act-by-act

application of rationality whatever the content of desires (or preferences); and a third relating to the specific behavioural implications of rationality assumptions in particular situations. We refer to these dimensions as the motivational, the dispositional and the expressive, respectively, and we will discuss each in turn in what follows.

The structure of the argument is very simple. The next three sections lay out, as briefly as possible, the essential characteristics of each of the three identified dimensions. Having thus identified the revisionist position, we then turn to outlining the advantages of this position over its mainstream alternative.

The motivational

While taking the broad idea of 'utility maximisation' to be a defining feature of the motivational structure of individuals engaged in either private or public choices, we want to argue for a rather broader concept of 'utility' than is typically assumed in the mainstream approach to public choice theory, where utility is often taken to be restricted to a relatively narrow concept of self-interest. Before sketching out the substance of what we have in mind, it is worthwhile to signal a more methodological issue, normally referred to as an application of Occam's razor. The basic idea here is that if two or more alternative explanations of the same phenomenon present themselves, and each accounts for the phenomenon to the same extent, then one should adopt the more parsimonious of the explanations, where a theory is 'more parsimonious' than a rival if it invokes a subset of the assumptions invoked by that rival. Strictly speaking, this test requires that motivations other than narrow self-interest can be logically derived from the assumption of self-interest, without the introduction of additional empirical claims (ones that would effectively add to the axiom set). In practice, the 'parsimony' issue is usually less one of logical entailment and more one of the optimal degree of abstraction. And in the exercise of 'optimal abstraction', trade-offs between different methodological principles are involved, and views as to the appropriate weights to be placed on different principles might differ as between scholars, as well as differing according to the perceived purpose of the theory – itself often a contested issue. In the present context, the parsimony principal is often taken to imply that if a rational actor model explaining phenomenon X on the basis of strict and narrow self-interest can be constructed, it should be preferred to any rational actor model of phenomenon X that utilizes a broader concept of agent motivation. While there is much to be said for Occam's razor, the

arguments for parsimony itself are not totally knock-down[4]. As we have suggested, much depends on the intended purpose of the theory or model under review, and we will argue later that, in at least some circumstances, there are reasons to be interested in the less parsimonious model.

Returning to the substantive issues of motivation, much of what we have in mind was outlined in the opening chapters of Brennan and Hamlin, *Democratic Devices and Desires*, where we introduce the idea of what we there termed 'somewhat moral motivations'. These motivations are directly responsive to normative considerations; that is, to considerations that are taken to have normative status by the individual concerned. We claim that such motivations can still be analysed in terms of desires and beliefs - the desire to act as morality (or norms) requires, and a set of beliefs about what morality (or norms) does require in particular circumstances. And, clearly, since the desires and beliefs belong to the individual in exactly the same way as do other desires and beliefs (for example, those that relate to mainstream self-interested preferences) there is no logical or formal difficulty in incorporating these somewhat moral motivations within the standard framework of utility maximisation. We make no strong or specific claims about the precise content of these moral or normative motivations; indeed, we suggest that such motivations will be varied and somewhat unevenly distributed in the population both in terms of their precise content and in terms of their strength (relative, say, to standard preferences). Motivational heterogeneity in the normative domain is, therefore, a hallmark of our understanding of the revisionist position. On this account, individuals are both rational and somewhat moral, with different individuals taking rather different views both on the specifics of what morality requires, and on the strength of moral claims relative to prudential or other claims. On this view, moral or normative motivations sit alongside other motivations within any individual - they do not pre-empt or otherwise dominate those other motivations but, we argue, their presence will at least sometimes make a difference to action.

To the general idea of somewhat moral or normative motivations, we add the further idea of esteem as a motivational force[5]. We place this idea as providing one possible link between self-interest and more normative concerns. On the one hand, my quest for esteem is clearly self-interested to the extent that it relates to *my* quest for others' good opinion of *me* as a sort of positional consumption good. On the other hand, the means by which I may earn the esteem of others will be closely related to the normative positions that the relevant others take

– I earn the esteem of relevant others to the extent that I am seen to conform to certain prevailing norms, and these norms themselves need have little to do with the direct pursuit of self-interest narrowly conceived. For example, certain acts of public engagement, or charity, are likely to be consistent with social norms that are generally endorsed and these acts are also likely to be relevant to the esteem in which I am held by others. In this way, my self-interested desire for esteem would reinforce any more directly moral motivation I might have to conform to the relevant normative standard.

Taken by itself, the idea of esteem as a motivator might be construed as part of a strategy of reducing apparently normative motivations to self-interested motivations (so as to be more 'parsimonious' in the account of motivation). Behaviour that may appear on the surface to be 'moral' or 'normative' in nature would now be explained in terms of the quest for 'esteem' as a private, self-interested good. But we resist this interpretation and favour an account in which esteem may act to reinforce or amplify normative concerns that also have direct motivational force of their own. This richer picture is preferred, in part, because it allows us to understand cases where esteem and morality come apart, as well as cases where they work in concert.

We will postpone till later the consideration of the advantages we claim for this richer motivational account. For now, we simply identify this richer motivational landscape as a key part of the revisionist position.

The dispositional [6]

The second dimension of our revisionist position reflects a shift from the act-by-act application of rational choice to what we term the dispositional level. There is a useful, if rough, analogy here with the shift from act-utilitarianism to rule-utilitarianism. Roughly, a disposition is a kind of internal commitment that might be identified with a temperament, temper, inclination, trait, commitment, or mind-set. One might be disposed to tell the truth, or one might be of a cautious disposition; but, if so, this would not necessarily mean that one always told the truth, or avoided all avoidable risks. A disposition – whatever its specific content – is not an absolute determinant or guarantor of behaviour in the relevant domain. Nevertheless, a disposition does carry some motivational weight that may modify, and sometimes dominate, what might otherwise be desired and chosen. A truthful disposition will

reduce the number of lies told relative to the situation in which the disposition is absent and all other desires and circumstances are identical.

We conceive of a disposition as a piece of motivational apparatus that may be influenced by first or higher order desires in the long term, and which operates to condition or govern first order desires and behaviour in the short term. Dispositions may in the long term be objects of choice, to at least some extent, but in the short term they typically serve to reduce the role of rational calculation. A disposition, therefore, lies somewhere between the extremes of a hard-wired model of determinism in which behaviour is fully committed and independent of the consideration of desires, on the one hand, and 'wanton'[7] behaviour in which individuals follow each fleeting whim or want without any restraint, on the other. Of course, the range between these two extremes is considerable, covering all forms of habitual behaviour, rules of thumb, personal and social norms of behaviour, and so on. We will not attempt to categorise all of the possibilities, or to provide a taxonomy of the spectrum. We simply note the family resemblance across this range and stipulate that a disposition occupies a place on this spectrum such that the strength of the commitment relative to simple first order desires is significant, but not necessarily overpowering.

This formulation entails a certain structural relationship between dispositions and desires. Dispositions might be said to govern desires or decisions in the same way that a convention governs behaviour over some relevant domain, or the rules of a game govern behaviour within that game. Compliance with the convention, rule or disposition is not automatic, and may be withheld in some cases, but the existence of the convention, rule or disposition is at least influential. This link between the idea of a disposition and the idea of an internal constitutional rule[8] is one that provides a clear connection between the interest in, and analysis of, dispositions and the constitutional political economy approach to politics more generally.

The content of a disposition may also shape its form. The examples already given of a disposition to tell the truth, or to be cautious, might be termed *general conditioning dispositions* in that they apply, to a greater or lesser extent, to a wide range of decision contexts and domains[9]. Other dispositions may be more selective, with relevance to specific domains of behaviour – for example the commitment to be a vegetarian or to support a specific sports team. Such dispositions might be classed as *specific conditioning dispositions*.

A third type of disposition[10] – which we term *modal dispositions* - picks out a particular mode of decision making which may then be applied to the choice among possible actions. Thus a modal disposition identifies both a class of choice situations and a choice rule, and involves the application of the specified rule in the specified class of situations. Seen in this way, self-interested calculation over actions (together with some specification of the class of actions to which it should apply) is itself a disposition: the modal disposition of rational egoism. This disposition tells you to take that action which, of those actions that are available to you, makes your life go best for you (i.e. maximises your expected lifetime pay-off). But the disposition of rational egoism is not necessarily the disposition that will make your life go best for you. Your expected lifetime pay-off may be larger if you were to have a different disposition. (The analysis of rational trustworthiness is a relevant example here.) If this is true, the disposition of rational egoism (the strict *homo economicus* disposition) is self-defeating in Parfit's sense; and it would be in your own interest to choose a different disposition if only that is possible.

Dispositions, on this account, are distinct from both desires (of whatever order) and beliefs. Dispositions provide the framework within which desires interact with beliefs in generating decisions or actions. It might be suggested that dispositions are a variety of second order desires – but we would resist this suggestion on the grounds that while one might have second order desires that relate to dispositions (indicting the desirability of having a particular disposition, say) this is not the same thing as the disposition itself. Similarly, it might be argued that a disposition is a kind of belief (for example the belief that morality requires particular actions), but again we would resist this suggestion on the grounds that a disposition plays a role that is rather more specific than a belief – it commits the individual to particular action in ways that the holding of a belief does not. Beliefs of a certain sort may be a necessary precondition or input to a disposition, but beliefs are not the whole story.

Perhaps the most plausible suggestion is that a disposition is the product of a belief and a desire – so that, for example a moral disposition might be formed of a combination of a belief that morality requires particular actions, and the desire to act as morality requires. And this formulation gets close to the suggestion here. Close, but not quite there. What this formulation still misses is the extent or degree of the commitment involved in a disposition. The combined belief-desire account would still locate the moral motivation at the level of a desire – in the example used, the desire to act as morality requires. And this desire would sit

alongside other desires that might point to other actions. There is then the further question of how the individual decides in the face of any particular complex belief-desire context. The point that we would stress about a disposition is that it implies some additional structure to decision making over and above simply providing another desire-belief input.

So far, we have spoken only about the content of a disposition and the position of dispositions in the motivational machinery. We now turn briefly to consider the source and evolution of dispositions. Dispositions may arise and evolve under a variety of causal influences. Some of these influences may lie outside of the control of the individual. We make no claim that all dispositions can be fully determined by the will or behaviour of the individual concerned - even in the long term. (Clearly the idea of a disposition as a relatively fixed part of an individual's motivational apparatus rules out the short-term control of one's own dispositions). However, we do claim that many relevant dispositions - of each of the three types identified above - can be at least *influenced* by the individual (and, indeed by other individuals - parents, advisors, friends, and so on).

It seems clear that some dispositions of the specific conditioning kind can be explicitly chosen and/or reinforced by behaviour. Commitment strategies such as vegetarianism or adopting an exercise regime are everyday examples of such dispositions. But it is equally clear that the choice and reinforcement of such a disposition is not a trivial matter. The fate of most New Year resolutions, and the difficulties of giving up smoking, remind us that dispositional choice and reinforcement behaviour are costly in terms of other desires denied. In this regard, we suggest that more general and modal dispositions are also susceptible to choice and reinforcement, at least to some extent. We can resolve to be more cautious, or more truthful, or more calculatively rational in our financial decision making. And our resolve can, at least sometimes, be translated into modified dispositions through both efforts of will and reinforcing behaviour.

We have illustrated the idea of a disposition by reference to the possibility of a moral disposition, and this reflects the potential interaction between the motivational aspect of our revisionist position and the dispositional aspect. While we clearly do not mean to imply that all dispositions are moral (or responsive to normative concerns) in their nature, and we explicitly recognise that the dispositional move is open to those who wish to pursue a strategy that is thoroughly self-interested in terms of the ultimate drivers of behaviour, we do want to stress the possibility that somewhat moral motivations can also be the basis for moral

dispositions, where the dispositional nature of the concern embeds morality in a distinctive way in the logic of rational choice. In short, the possibility of moral dispositions in at least some individuals significantly ups the ante in terms of the role of normative concerns in economic behaviour in general, and in public choice models of political behaviour in particular.

The expressive

So, the revisionist position that we adopt and advocate includes both the move to somewhat moral motivations, including the idea of esteem, and the dispositional move; and these two moves interact. But there is also a third move: the move from purely instrumental rationality to allow elements of expressive behaviour. This expressive move does not depend upon either the dispositional or the moral moves, but again we argue that it may interact with them.

Since a considerable amount has been written about the expressive move elsewhere[11], we will be very brief here. Essentially, the expressive argument recognizes that there may be benefits (generalised utility) from speech acts (or equivalent acts) that merely express an opinion or view or preference, even if that speech act has no further consequences and, in particular, even if that act plays no causal or instrumental role in bringing about the preference expressed, or realising the underlying view, or persuading others of the underlying opinion, etc. In many circumstances we might expect such expressive benefits to be small relative to the more standard instrumental benefits, and we might also expect the (speech) acts that realise the expressive benefits to be entirely consistent with the acts that bring about the end for which a preference is expressed. But in at least some cases, of relevance to the study of politics, these connections come apart. The now standard example relates to voting in a mass election. The large number of voters in many elections makes the probability that any single vote will have any instrumental impact vanishingly small, thus effectively removing any consequential or instrumental reason for voting in any particular way, or indeed for voting at all. At the same time, it is easy to imagine that at least some individuals will derive expressive benefits from voicing political opinions; and the opinions so expressed may well involve positions on policy that differ from those policies that those individuals would choose to bring about if they were instrumentally decisive. In these circumstances, we might expect expressive voting to carry with it implications for the content of voting as well as the level of turnout, and in both of these ways to have an effect on substantive political outcomes[12].

In a sense, the idea behind the expressive argument is the inverse of the argument relating to 'cheap talk' in the game theoretic literature[13]. There, the point is, roughly, that if pre-play communication does not have an impact on the fundamentals of the game, all such communication will be 'cheap talk' and can be ignored when analyzing the actual play of the game[14]. The expressive take on this observation is to point out that privately inconsequential talk or action can nevertheless have cumulative, public consequences, so that in at least some contexts cheap talk may be politically significant, and furthermore, this form of expressive activity will be promoted precisely because it is 'cheap' – that is, precisely because the cost of such expressions in terms of private opportunities forgone is low.

That expressive behaviour, whether in voting or in other aspects of politics, can interact with somewhat moral motivations, esteem, and the dispositional approach to rationality should be clear enough. On the one hand, we argue that expressive behaviour is particularly relevant in political settings where the connection between individual action and outcomes is attenuated, and these are also the circumstances in which motivational factors such as morality and esteem may well also come to the fore, simply because the force of mainstream ideas of self-interest is at its weakest in such circumstances[15]. On the other hand, expressive activity may directly amplify moral or esteem-seeking behaviour, making it more likely that these motivations are actually expressed.

The advantages of revisionism

So, if revisionist public choice theory departs from its mainstream parent in respect of each of the motivational, the dispositional and the expressive, at least two questions need addressing: is it still public choice theory at all? And why adopt the revisionist position rather than the mainstream?

To the first of these questions we answer with an emphatic yes. And we do so both because the strong family resemblance outweighs the novelty associated with the revisionist position, and because the seeds of each of the three identified dimensions of revisionism lie deep in the traditions of public choice theory itself.

The strong family resemblance is in part the result of a shared commitment to analytic modelling that takes the structure of individual rationality as one of its foundations. Our

concern is to extend the range of explanation that the rationality approach admits. It would be absurd to construe this aim as abandoning our commitment to that approach.

In respect of the seeds of the revisionist ideas, this is not the place for detailed exegesis, but it should be clear that the idea of motivations that extend beyond the narrowly self-interested are present in the early public choice texts[16]. Indeed, the chief arguments for restricting interest to the narrowly self-interested might be seen to be methodological and strategic rather than substantive. The methodological argument was, and is, largely an appeal to Occam's razor, and we will come to that in a moment, but first we want to identify the strategic element.

It is possible to see the early public choice literature as both a critique of orthodox economic analysis and an attempt to employ a reformulated economic analysis in the political domain. We want to emphasise the former rather than the later. The essential element of the public choice critique of then-mainstream economics was aimed at the thoroughly normative nature of the economic analysis of government policy – often caricatured in the phrase 'policy analysis on the assumption of a benign dictator'. Strategically, then, it was essential for public choice to establish its 'positive' or essentially explanatory status in sharp contrast to the normatively loaded position of mainstream economic analysis. And to this end, it was appropriate to suppress all normative elements.

But times and strategic priorities change. Mainstream economic analysis has now shifted to adopt the public choice position to a close approximation, and now builds increasingly sophisticated models to explain political phenomena by reference to the narrow self-interest of the hyper-rational individuals involved. And so, it is perhaps time to recognise that the shift from the normatively loaded benign despot model to the positive public choice model risks throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Risks, that is, dismissing the possible significance of normative concerns as motivators of political action, along with the self-serving bias of ascribing particular normative motivations exclusively to the band of government agents and advisors.

In a sense, the debate has moved on to the point where now we think that a major strategic concern facing public choice theory is its engagement with normative political theory and normative analysis more generally. Clearly, there has always been a normative aspect of public choice theory, best understood in terms of its recommendations for institutional design

and reform, where attention focuses on the properties of alternative sets of institutional rules, and their relationship to the polities that might be expected to emerge from their operation by rational individuals. The general point here is that normative consideration of the structures and institutions of politics may be both more powerful and less idiosyncratic than normative theorising on specific policies.

Nevertheless, while the normative aspirations of rational choice theory are best understood in terms of its institutional recommendations, the enterprise of normative public choice theory still requires a substantive normative criterion, and the normative criterion underlying public choice theory might be crudely categorised as a form of normative individualism. By this we mean only that whether or not some particular institutional reform is considered, on balance, to be worthwhile will depend crucially upon that reform's impact on individuals and how well their lives go. We do not mean to place any specific limits on what is included in the set of things that make an individual's life go well (or better) and, in particular, we do not necessarily restrict this set to any particular notion of 'welfare'. But we do suggest that a hallmark of normative rational choice theory is that it adopts an essentially individualistic approach to value, so that social or collective value supervenes on individual value[17].

Now, the problem for public choice theory in normative mode is that the more general normative debate operates in rather different terms. Post Rawls, the general debate might be characterised in terms of a sort of liberal pluralism in which a variety of potentially normatively salient ideals can be identified and interrogated, with an essentially political problem being that a liberal society must include individuals who take different views of the relative weights to place on the various conceptions of the good and/or the right[18]. This sketch of liberal pluralism builds on the idea that normative concerns, whatever their detailed structure and content, can be both the subject of public debate and significant drivers of political behaviour.

We believe that the revisionist public choice position that we have outlined has the ability to connect the debate within normative public choice theory to the wider debate within normative political theory. By allowing directly normative considerations to enter into the explanatory model of political behaviour, the revisionist position also allows of an important connection between positive and normative theory[19].

Returning, at last, to the methodological point – we are now in a position to clarify our earlier point that the application of Occam's razor must be contingent on the intended purpose of the theory or model under consideration, so that it is not automatically the case that a simpler or more parsimonious theory should be preferred to a richer theory. Our more detailed position here is that the methodological defence of the narrowly self-interested version of rationality comes in two main varieties, one of which is a reasonably straightforward version of Occam's razor, while the other is a more sophisticated claim that it represents an appropriately 'risk averse' stance in relation to the project of institutional design[20]; we will argue that both are mistaken – albeit for different reasons.

The problem with the straightforward application of Occam's razor is that is focuses too heavily on the positive or explanatory role of public choice theory, while paying too little attention to the normative role of public choice theory. Even if we accept, for the sake of argument, that the two accounts of motivation offer similar levels of explanation of political behaviour, we would argue strongly that the enhanced account of motivation offers considerable greater normative insight and greater connectivity between the positive and the normative. Thus, we argue that since the enhanced model offers superior performance relative to its full range of intended objectives, it can not be rejected in favour of the simpler alternative by any simple application of Occam's razor.

The more sophisticated defence of the narrowly self-interested account of motivation admits that a primary purpose of the model is to ground normative theorising, but argues that it is appropriate to assume that all individuals are knaves so as to ensure that institutional design is proof against knavery. While this position has some appeal, we believe that it is flawed by the fact the assumption of universal knavery seriously limits the nature of institutional mechanisms that can be admitted, while the more descriptively accurate assumption of motivational heterogeneity which allows some role for moral motivations is more inclusive[21].

Just as a richer set of individual motivations were hinted at in the early public choice texts, so were the expressive and dispositional ideas. For example, in a recent essay Clark and Lee point particularly to Buchanan and Tullock for early sightings of the expressive idea being used to generate novel explanations and predictions of behaviour[22]. In relation to dispositions and 'internal constitutions' more generally, we have already mentioned the influence of Brennan and Buchanan, *The Reason of Rules*, but we should also point to the considerable output of Ron Heiner and the work of Hartmut Kliemt and his colleagues in relation to trust[23].

Our claim here is not just that the expressive and dispositional moves are rooted in the earlier public choice literature; we also assert that these revisionist moves are progressive in that they open up areas of analysis, and make connections to other literatures, that are unavailable to mainstream public choice theory.

Taken together, the three moves that we identify as constitutive of the revisionist position represent a shift in the understanding of the internal architecture of the typical individual's motivations, and the linkages from these motivations to actions. While we readily agree that one part of this shift is in the direction of re-introducing a normative element into the public choice model of explanation, we see this as an advantage rather than a criticism. If normative considerations do not motivate *someone*, then arguably normative analysis and recommendation is itself a somewhat futile activity– and all the professional effort involved in developing improved normative analysis of political questions can have no direct instrumental justification[24]. If public choice theory is to move much beyond the construction of increasingly intricate explanatory models, and engage seriously with the normative debate, it is surely appropriate for public choice theory itself to show how normative ideas (including, but not limited to, the normative ideas developed within public choice theory) can operate to influence individual behaviour and thereby political outcomes. We believe that the revisionist approach that we recommend makes progress toward this goal.

Notes

[1] Thomas Christiano, 'Is Normative Rational Choice Theory Self-Defeating?' *Ethics*, Vol. 115 (2004), pp. 122-141. Specifically, Christiano cites Geoffrey Brennan and Alan Hamlin, *Democratic Devices and Desires*, (Cambridge University Press, 2000) as exemplifying the revisionist position, and Russell Hardin, *Liberalism, Constitutionalism and Democracy*, (Oxford University Press, 1999), as representing sophisticated mainstream rational choice theory. We used the term 'revisionist' about ourselves as early as: Geoffrey Brennan and Alan Hamlin, 'A Revisionist View of the Separation of Powers', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, Vol. 6 (1994), pp. 345-368.

[2] See Geoffrey Brennan and Alan Hamlin, 'Positive Constraints on Normative Political Theory', *MANCEPT Working Paper 4/07, University of Manchester,* (2007) (http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/disciplines/politics/researchgroups/mancept/workingpapers/) for discussion of these disagreements.

[3] Some scholars would disagree. 'Public choice' is often associated with the normative project of analysing 'political failure' - in the spirit of that strand of welfare economics in which the category of 'market failure' is central. That particular project is sometimes seen as being ideologically motivated. The search for a different term ('rational choice political theory', 'positive political theory', 'modern political economy' are all in play) possibly reflects a desire to distance the project from any ideological connotation. Our view is that although the various terms may have different connotations the analytic core of the project remains the same.

[4] See Albert Hirschman, 'Against Parsimony: Three Easy Ways of Complicating Some Categories of Economic Discourse', *American Economic Review,* 74 (1984), pp. 89-96 and Albert Hirschman, 'Against Parsimony', *Economics and Philosophy,* Vol. 1 (1985), pp. 7-21 for discussion.

[5] See particularly, Geoffrey Brennan and Philip Pettit, *The Economy of Esteem* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

[6] This section draws on Alan Hamlin, 'Political Dispositions and Dispositional Politics', in Giuseppe Eusepi and Alan Hamlin, *Beyond Conventional Economics: The Limits of Rational Behaviour in Political Decision-Making* (Edward Elgar, 2006) pp. 3-16.

[7] In the sense of Harry Frankfurt, 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person', *Journal of Philosophy,* Vol. 68 (1971), pp. 5-20.

[8] The connection between internal personal constitutions and political constitutions appears, for example, in Geoffrey Brennan and James M. Buchanan, *The Reason of Rules* (Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[9] For extended discussion of a specific general conditioning disposition – the conservative disposition – see Geoffrey Brennan and Alan Hamlin, 'Analytic Conservatism', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 34 (2004), pp. 675-691 and Geoffrey Brennan, and Alan Hamlin, 'Conservatism, Idealism and Cardinality', *Analysis,* Vol. 66 (2006), pp. 286-295.

[10] We make no claim that these three types of dispositions exhaust the possibilities.

[11] For more detailed discussion of the expressive argument see Geoffrey Brennan and Loren Lomasky, *Democracy and Decision* (Cambridge University Press, 1993); Alexander Schuessler, A *Logic of Expressive Choice* (Princeton University Press, 2000); Brennan and Hamlin, *Democratic Devices and Desires*. For empirical investigations of expressive voting behaviour see: Cassandra Copeland and David Laband, 'Expressiveness and voting', *Public Choice*, Vol. 110 (2002), pp. 351-363; Jean-Robert Tyran, 'Voting when money and morals conflict: An experimental test of expressive voting', *Journal of Public Economics* Vol. 88 (2004), pp. 1645-1664; Colin Jennings and Stephen Drinkwater, 'Who are the expressive voters?' *Public Choice*, Vol. 132 (2007), pp.179-189.

[12] See Geoffrey Brennan and Alan Hamlin, 'Expressive Voting and Electoral Equilibrium' *Public Choice*, Vol. 95 (1998), pp. 149-175. While voting in a large scale election is the prime example of expressive behaviour, it is not the only area in which the expressive idea might carry implications. For discussion of expressive issues in the formation of political groups, and in the role of political leaders see Alan Hamlin and Colin Jennings, 'Group Formation and Political Conflict: Instrumental and Expressive Approaches', *Public Choice,* Vol. 118 (2004), pp. 413-435; Alan Hamlin and Colin Jennings, 'Leadership and Conflict', *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, Vol. 64 (2007), pp. 49-68.

[13] For an overview of the 'cheap talk' literature see Joseph Farrell and Matthew Rabin, 'Cheap Talk', *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol.10 (1996), pp. 103-118.

[14] As an empirical matter there does seem to be pretty convincing evidence that such talk does make a difference. See, for example, David Sally, 'Conversation and Co-operation in Social Dilemmas', *Rationality and Society,* Vol. 7 (1995), pp. 58-92.

[15] Of course, expressive behaviour may express aspects of personality, identity and passion as well as responding to normative concerns and the issue of esteem. For discussion of the relationship between (rational) interests and passions see Albert Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* (Princeton University Press, 1977); Michael Walzer, 'Passion and Politics', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol. 28 (2002), pp. 617–633; Michael Walzer, *Politics and Passion: Toward a More Egalitarian Liberalism* (Yale University Press, 2006).

[16] See, for example, the discussion of moral attitudes to trade in chapter 18 of James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, *The Calculus of Consent* (University of Michigan Press, 1962). Of course, broader motivations are also important in many of the classic texts cited by public choice theorists – such as Madison's contributions to the Federalist Papers.

[17] For related discussion see John Broome, *Weighing Goods* (Blackwells, 1991), whose 'principal of personal good' is individualistic in this sense since if something is good, it must be good for (at least) someone.

[18] We identify this as an essentially political problem to distinguish it from the essentially ethical problem of addressing the truth (if any) of alternative claims to normative salience, and the precise meaning of normative statements.

[19] This connection is the major theme of Brennan and Hamlin, 'Positive Constraints on Normative Political Theory'.

[20] As put, for example, in Geoffrey Brennan and James M. Buchanan, *The Power to Tax* (Cambridge University Press, 1980), and in Brennan and Buchanan, *The Reason of Rules.*

[21] This was a major theme of Brennan and Hamlin, *Democratic Devices and Desires*; see also Julian Le Grand, *Motivation, Agency and Public Policy: Of Knights and Knaves, Pawns and Queens* (Oxford University Press, 2003); Timothy Besley, *'Principled Agents?: The Political Economy of Good Government* (Oxford University Press, 2006). Of course, heterogeneity of detailed motivation allows the possibility that at least some individuals are knaves and so retains the idea that, ceteris paribus, institutions should be designed to be knave-proof; although this is by no means the only criteria by which institutions may be judged.

[22] See discussion in J.R. Clark and Dwight Lee, 'Expressive voting: how special interests enlist their victims as political allies', in Giuseppe Eusepi and Alan Hamlin, *Beyond Conventional Economics: The Limits of Rational Behaviour in Political Decision-Making*, (Edward Elgar, 2006) pp. 17-32*;* and their references to James M. Buchanan, 'Individual Choice in Voting and the Market', *The Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 62 (1954), pp. 334-43, and Gordon Tullock, 'The Charity of the Uncharitable', *Western Economic Journal,* Vol. 9 (1971), pp. 379-92.

[23] See, particularly, Ronald Heiner, 'The Origin of Predictable Behavior', *American Economic Review,* Vol. 73 (1983), pp. 560-595; Ronald Heiner, 'The Origin of Predictable Dynamic Behavior', *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization,* Vol. 12 (1989), pp. 233-257; and Werner Güth and Hartmut Kliemt, 'Competition or Cooperation: On the Evolutionary Economics of Trust, Exploitation and Moral Attitudes', *Metroeconomica* Vol. 45 (1994), pp. 155-187.

[24] We do not mean that normative analysis would be completely unjustifiable in such a case - merely that justification would be indirect - for example, it would still be possible for normative analysis to evaluate alternative social outcomes or policies but, absent any motivational impact, such evaluation could play no direct causal role in bringing about those outcomes or policies that were deemed good (better) or right.