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RATIONAL-IRRATIONAL ELECTORAL PREFERENCES, ALTRUISM AND EXPRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

Caplan (2000, 2001, 2006) proposed the rational-irrationality model arguing that irrationality is a good as any other, whose consumption is maximized in relation to its costs and benefits. Applying this model to the problem of electoral behavior Caplan implies that voters 'afford' many irrational beliefs, because the lack of individual decisiveness renders vote as a consequenceless act. This paper contributes to the development of knowledge by analyzing the compatibility of rational irrationality with active electoral behavior. Two important arguments are being proposed: First, Wittman's (2008) intuition that rational irrationality is incompatible with voting could be supported only about a particular type of altruism, which Caplan actually seems to reject. Second, rational irrationality seems to be compatible with expressive motivations, reinforcing the conclusion that rational-irrational individuals are active voters in mass elections.

Key words: rational irrationality, pure altruism, imperfect altruism, decisiveness, expressive voting.

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1. Introduction

The way people get informed or vote in the electoral events specific to contemporary democracies has been the subject of numerous studies in social and behavioral sciences. Since Downs (1957), voting behavior has become important in economists' concerns. Starting with the standard methodological principles of neoclassical economics – methodological individualism, expected utility maximization, homo economicus (i.e. instrumental rationality and selfishness) – Downs argued that individuals have few rational reasons (rationality being defined as above) to be informed or to vote. Based on their indecisiveness, individuals choose to remain ignorant about the quality of electoral alternatives – they are rational ignorant. Moreover, electoral participation (voting) would also be underprovided. In other words, two of the core issues on which the health of democracy rests, information and participation – will be underprovided. These two results were differently received by the academic community. If in the case of rational ignorance the degree of adoption was higher due to its compatibility with observed behavior – i.e. citizens are often political ignorant – in the case of the abstention prediction the acceptance was of course difficult – electoral participation is indeed much higher than anticipated by Downs' (1957) and later by Tullock's (1967) model. Starting from this obvious failure, public choice researchers have formulated numerous alternatives to the classical model. The most important of them, the expressive voting model (Brennan, Buchanan, 1984; Brennan Lomasky, 1985, 1987, 1997; Brennan, Hamlin, 1998) and the altruistic voting model (Jankowski, 2002, 2007, Fowler, 2006; Edlin, Gelman, Kaplan, 2007), solved the problem of incompatibility with observable facts. In these models the problem of information has remained marginal, rational ignorance hypothesis being most likely tacitly accepted. In (1999, 2000, 2006), Caplan explicitly attacks this norm of Public Choice Theory. According to Caplan, voters' undeniable ignorance is not really that rational. Being a rational ignorant implies unsystematic behaviors but what Caplan argues is that voters display systematic bias rather than random errors. Ignorance of this kind is therefore irrational. The reason for these systematic biases is not in turn irrational. In Caplan's terms: "When there are weak incentives to reach correct answers, an otherwise intelligent person may opt to turn off his critical faculties and believe whatever makes him feel best." (Caplan, 2004: 471). In other words, irrationality is rationally chosen. Caplan discusses the implications of this way of conceiving rationality on electoral behavior. His analysis focused though on the issue of quality and forming of electoral preferences, ignoring the issue of electoral participation. Voting is implicitly assumed in Caplan's work, but it is never treated as a problem in need for an explanation. On this problem, Wittman (2008) mentioned the possibility that rational

irrationality may be inconsistent with voting, being therefore affected by the same problem as Downs-Tullock model of electoral behavior. From this, I analyze the consistency of the rational irrationality model trying to learn to what extent Wittman's critique can be sustained. Thus, I discuss pure altruism, non-instrumental warm-glow altruism, instrumental warm-glow altruism and expressive motivations in connection to rational irrationality. I will address these issues in the following sequence: First I shortly present the public choice models of ignorance and voting, then I present the rational irrationality model, and finally, I develop the analysis briefly presented above.

2. The problem of information and electoral behavior in public choice theory

As mentioned in the previous section, the public choice study of electoral behavior begins with Downs (1957), (1957b) and connects the issue of electoral participation with that of the quality of information voters have about electoral alternatives. In terms of rational ignorance, Downs assumes that the information is instrumentally valuable and, given "the insignificance of any one voter in a large electorate (Downs, 1957b: p.146), the returns of voting "correctly are infinitesimal" (Downs, 1957b: p.146). In other words, "it is irrational for most citizens to acquire political information for purposes of voting" (Downs, 1957b: p.147). In addition, the quality of democracy (which depends on the information that people have about politics) is a non-exclusive good – once produced, it is indivisible and will be open to consumption for both those who participated in providing it and those who did not. For this reason everyone has incentives to avoid paying information costs, thus becoming free riders. The fundamental assumption of rational ignorance, namely the individual indecisiveness in mass elections is a critical assumption also for implying voting abstention. Based on the result published by Downs (1957, 1957b), Tullock (1967) proposed the following formula: $R = pBA - C_v - C_i$, where R is the reward (payoff) received for voting, B is the (differential) benefit expected to be derived from the success of your party/candidate, P is the probability of your vote being decisive (with $0 \leq p \leq 1$) in bringing about of B , A stands for voter's estimate of the accuracy of his judgment, C_v is the cost of voting and C_i is the cost of obtaining information. In the public choice literature, however a simplified version of this formula is often used: $R = pB - C$. The structure of the calculus of voting model is as follows: First, voters are primarily conceived as instrumental and selfish utility maximizers (homo economicus); Secondly all voters are able to correctly estimate the costs (C) and benefits (B) of the act of voting; Third, all

voters know the value of P , being aware of the unlikelihood of their decisiveness in mass elections. The implication of these assumptions is that most citizens will abstain from voting – a conclusion being in obvious conflict with the observables of democratic elections. For this reason alternative models have been formulated, retaining the fundamental methodological principles of public choice theory and giving up the least important ones: the expressive voting and the altruist voting. Both retained the expected utility maximization and gave up the homo economicus assumption – *i.e.* instrumental behavior (the case of expressive voting) or selfishness² (the case of altruist voting). In the case of expressive voting, individuals express either their partisan support (Fiorina, 1976, Brennan and Buchanan 1984, Brennan and Hamlin, 1998; Kan and Yang, 2001) or their moral feelings (Buchanan, 1954; Tullock, 1971; Brennan and Lomasky, 1985, 1987). In both cases, however, the model structure is the same: voters are non-instrumental utility maximizers. They are all capable to correctly estimate the costs (C) and the benefits (B) of voting and they are all aware of the low value of P – the improbability of individual decisiveness. But with the non-instrumental component, the effect of P is counterbalanced and the model has an implication consistent with the facts: rational-expressive individuals are active voters. Regarding the altruistic voting model (Jankowski, 2002, 2007; Edlin, Gelman, Kaplan, 2007) individuals are conceived as having utility functions that include considerations about the welfare of other people – *e.g.* they vote for the country or for the common good. The model is primarily based on the assumption of instrumental altruistic maximization of expected utility³. In this model voters are able to correctly estimate the costs (C) and benefits (B) of voting and they have a fair representation of the value of P . The conclusion of this model is also compatible with reality: Since B has a component that includes the welfare of others, its value increases with the number of ‘others’ and cancels the effect of the low value of P . In the next section I present a more recent model of electoral behavior that focuses on the issue of preference formation and ignorance rather than voting, but which has implications for the latter - the rational irrationality model.

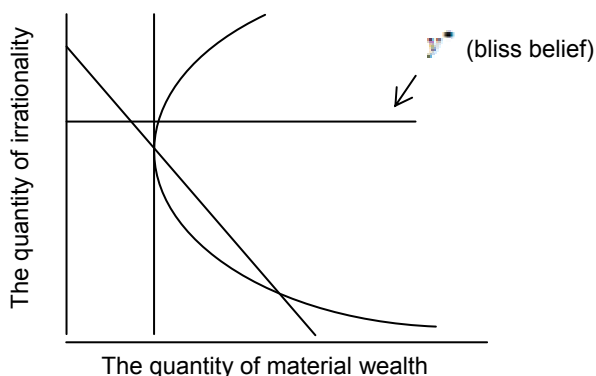
² In a later section I will however, discuss a case where altruism has a selfish component.

³ Except for an interpretation of altruism given by Andreoni (1989, 1990), which I discuss in a later section.

3. The rational irrationality model

One implication of the neoclassical methodological framework for analyzing electoral behavior (presented in the previous section) is that individuals evaluate electoral (they don't act randomly) alternatives and they have unbiased preferences. In (2000) Caplan argued, however, that this idea should be only partially accepted, and that, in fact, individuals may have a rational demand for irrationality - they are rationally irrational in a "near-neoclassical" way. (Caplan, 2000: p.196) The underlying idea of this new way to conceive rationality is that individuals can formulate preferences over their beliefs based on the costs and benefits that they have. In this view, beliefs are equivalent to any other good whose consumption is maximized by individuals. More, each individual has a bliss belief, (*i.e.* a belief that makes him feel good) and the individual demand for irrationality would be determined by its cost. The idea is illustrated in Figure 1, below.

Figure 1: The Wealth/Irrationality Budget Line



Source: Caplan, 2000: p.195 (adapted after)

The wealth/irrationality budget line shows which combinations of welfare-irrationality are feasible. (Caplan, 2000: p.194). Its intersection with the wealth axis indicates a pure neoclassical preference – the consumption of irrationality is zero. Its intersection with the Irrationality axis illustrates the consumption of the bliss belief.⁴ Depending on the cost of irrationality, individual preferences deviate from the standard neoclassical rationality going closer to the bliss belief. Fundamental to this model is the assumption that the exchange between welfare and

⁴ In Caplan's words, "When the price of irrationality is zero people adhere to their bliss belief, consuming irrationality until they are 'satiated'" (Caplan, 2001a: p.314).

irrationality units is based on an unbiased judgment about the tradeoff. Therefore rational irrational agents have rational expectations about the slope of their wealth/irrationality budget line – they “perceive the impact of their irrationality on their wealth without bias” (Caplan, 2000: p.195). In other words, individuals are aware that an increase in their psychological welfare (being closer to their bliss belief) can result in a loss of material welfare. Caplan (2004) provided the following example to illustrate this: “a doctor may want to believe that he can perform surgery while drunk without additional risk, but this belief would have high expected material costs from law suits and loss of business” (Caplan, 2004: p.471). Given its high price, irrationality will not occur – the doctor will not consume his bliss belief in this case.

This model has as its main application the problem of information and of citizens' electoral preferences. Regarding the information, Caplan (2006) noted: “What voters don't know would fill an university library” (Caplan, 2006: p.5). This ignorance, however, is not explained by the rational ignorance hypothesis. The errors of judgment and choice that voters make are not caused only by the lack of information. In fact, Caplan (2006: p.100) argues that emotional attachment seems to be a better candidate to explain them. According to Caplan (2001b, 2004, 2006), the beliefs that voters and people in general have, are not ‘impartial’ as implied by the rational ignorance hypothesis. Actually, these beliefs are biased, and are better explained by the rational irrationality model. A key factor here is the fact that in mass elections the private costs of irrationality is insignificant. Returning to the example of the doctor, although he cannot afford to operate while being drunk, he “could however vote on the basis of lame economic sophisms without fear of negative consequences. Since his vote is almost certain to have no effect on the outcome anyway, he could safely indulge irrational political beliefs at the ballot box even though he refrains from such cognitive excesses on the operating table” (Caplan, 2004: p.471). Individual indecisiveness in mass elections therefore explains why voters are rational-irrational. Based on these considerations Caplan identifies four systematic biases that voters have. These are not, however, important for my analysis, and therefore they are not to be presented here.

4. Rational irrationality, abstention, altruism and non-instrumental behavior

Caplan's theory was rather critically received. Tullock (2008) labeled it as an "attack on democracy" (Tullock, 2008: p.485) and Bennett, Friedman (2008) argued that the very concept of rational irrationality is inconsistent and there is no solid evidence to support Caplan's conclusion that emotions or ideology could explain public errors regarding economic issues. This latter criticism was also formulated by Wittman (2008) who noted that the way Caplan interpreted the data is less than convincing and that he was unable to demonstrate that rational irrationality could replace rational ignorance (Wittman, 2008: p369). Another criticism made by Elster and Landemore (2008) was that Caplan's theory was deeply ideological and conceptually confused. Most of these criticisms focused on the four biases Caplan identified and on his conclusions about democracy. Some of them, however, have focused on the methodological difficulties of the rational irrationality model. My analysis falls into this latter category discussing the problem of consistency of Caplan's model.

4.1. The significance of voting as a consequenceless act and the abstention prediction

As mentioned in the introductory section, Caplan does not formulate an explicit argument about electoral participation. Such argument is though implied - rational irrational individuals seem to be active voters and this fact remains unquestioned in Caplan's work. Regarding this issue, Wittman (2008) expressed an intuition (without developing it into a solid critique) about a possible problem: "voters behave as if their votes were important. First, they vote, which is costly; if they thought their vote did not count, then they probably would not vote."⁵ (Wittman, 2008: p.372). In what follows I will develop the analysis shortly indicated by Wittman, focusing on the issue of internal consistency of Caplan's model.

A first step is to clarify its logical structure. Caplan repeats in several papers (2000, 2001, 2004, 2006) the idea that voters are aware that their vote is consequenceless. This idea is consistent with both the calculus of voting model, and the expressive and the altruistic voting models. In all these models voters know that their vote is without consequences. This idea, however, is unclear and should be further studied. In the terms proposed in section 2 of this article (R , p , B , C) the sentence "voters are aware that their vote is consequenceless" certainly implies knowledge of the value of the term p , *i.e.* the probability of bringing about the benefit B . Some of Caplan's statements

⁵ Elster and Landemore (2008) expressed a similar intuition.

seem to indicate that "being consequenceless" exclusively means the knowledge of the P term."Since his vote is almost certain to have no effect on the outcome [...]" (Caplan, 2004: p.471) or "Democracy asks voters to make choices, but gives each only an infinitesimal influence. From the standpoint of the lone voter, what happens is independent of her choice" (Caplan, 2006: p.140). On the other hand, turning to the calculus of voting formula, the lack of consequences could comprise more than just knowing the value of P . If we accept this idea, then my voting is inconsequential for me not only because I know that the probability of being decisive is very small but also because I can correctly estimate the values of B and C . Suppose, for the sake of the argument, that things would be the opposite: voters know the value of P but not those of B and C . If this were the case, the principle of utility maximization would become unusable (I cannot maximize without knowing these values). But Caplan accepts the importance of this principle. From here, apparently we should accept as 'caplanian' (in Caplan's spirit) the assumption that rational-irrational voters, know also the values of B and C : in this respect, my choices are inconsequential if the value of C is 'sufficiently large' and the value of B is 'small enough' to 'activate' the value of P which is constantly very small. If, however, the value of B is 'large enough' and the value of C is 'small enough' P is counterbalanced and voting becomes an act that has consequences for me. If rational-irrational voters should know the values of B and C then their behavior would be consistent only if they would abstain from voting. Such a conclusion could be implied by the following argument: One of the fundamental premises of Caplan's model is that at some level, individuals know the exact costs of irrational beliefs that they may have when they vote. Taking one of Caplan's (2006) examples, I may believe, despite all the information available, that voting for the Communist Party is a good idea if I understand, at the choice over beliefs level, the values of P , B and C . (in the interpretation that these are all necessary to imply the lack of consequences of unilateral⁶ voting). But if this is so, then Caplan's model could only explain the emergence of communist beliefs, but not voting according to them. If the knowledge of P , B and C is required in order to maximize the utility in choosing beliefs⁷, being an active voter would involve a contrary belief, namely that my vote counts (Wittman's intuition). Hence, in this interpretation,

⁶ But it is arguable that in the choice of beliefs about electoral alternatives knowing all these terms is necessary. This idea is discussed below.

⁷ This however cannot be settled at this time of analysis.

Caplan's model would explain why people would have certain beliefs but not why would they vote according to them. If my vote is without consequences then whatever beliefs I may have, I would not have any reasons to vote according to them. Moreover, if the lack of consequences of voting would not involve knowing the values of B and C but only of p , then even if I am already in the voting booth (say I work there), I would have no reason to vote the party I prefer. So it is possible that I could believe that the communist alternative is the best, but in the same time I could vote for the Nazi party (since there is no way my vote could break a tie). This conclusion could be strengthened by some details that Caplan gave in the second part of the 'Myth of the rational voter' (2006): "Irrationality makes the individual better off" under the following condition:

"Psychological Benefits – p × Material Cost > 0 [...] If *p = 0* irrationality is utility-maximizing as long as there are any psychological benefits: *Psychological Benefits > 0*" (Caplan, 2006: p.146). From these formulas several implications can be derived: First, choosing electoral beliefs is connected to the likelihood of being decisive (this has the role of strengthening the idea that knowing p alone implies that voting is a consequenceless act). Secondly, the material cost of irrationality should not be confused with C from the calculus of voting formula, and the psychological benefit should not be confused with B from the same formula. What emerges from the above quote is that we should distinguish between two levels of choice, and that at the level of choice over beliefs, only the p factor appear to be required. Also, the quote reinforces the impression left by reading several of Caplan's works, namely that, in general, he assumes that $p = 0$ and that all voters know this. Based on these considerations and moving to the level of the decision to vote, the voters' knowledge of the value of p should be kept constant: if at the upper level (the level of choosing beliefs) it was assumed that $p = 0$, then an intuitive inter-domain invariance condition is that $p = 0$ also at the lower level (the decision to vote) – one cannot believe at one level that his/her vote does not bear any consequences, and at the other level that it does. If the invariance of p is a condition which Caplan would accept, then the exact value of B and C would be irrelevant. If $p = 0$ then $pB = 0$ and at any value of C , $pB - C \leq 0$. In this case Caplan's model would explain, as noted above, only the reason a person would think that communism is the best alternative, but would not also imply voting for the communist party – even being in the voting booth, he/she would have no selfish

instrumental reason to vote according to this belief. On the other hand, if $P > 0$, deducing whether a rational-irrational individual would vote, two conditions seem necessary: the first is rather obvious: maximizing over both levels (inter-domain maximizing) implies either that voter knew the value of all factors, either that some of these factors are irrelevant. Since this latter case was fairly discussed above, we are left with the conclusion that rational-irrational individuals should also know the values of C and B from the calculus of voting formula. But if this is the case and if we accept that B have rarely a big enough value to counterbalance the small value of P and almost any positive value of C , then the conclusion previously stated should be maintained: rational-irrational individuals may have communist, Nazi, Christian etc. beliefs, but they would not have any reasons for voting according to these beliefs (or voting at all). In this case Wittman's intuition would be correct.

4.2. Rational Irrationality, altruism and expressive voting

The above criticisms seem to seriously affect Caplan's model, but they cannot be stated with complete confidence unless certain issues about the nature of rational irrationality are clarified: Does it concern only selfish individuals, or is it compatible with altruism? Is it only instrumental or it is compatible with non-instrumental interpretations? These questions are relevant because we have already seen that the alternative models presented in section 2 were able to predict electoral participation building on altruism or non-instrumental considerations. So it should be determined the extent to which rational irrationality can be operationalized as altruistic or non-instrumental, and it should be clarified under which terms any such compatibility can save Caplan's model from the charges of internal inconsistency and incompatibility with the observables of democratic elections.

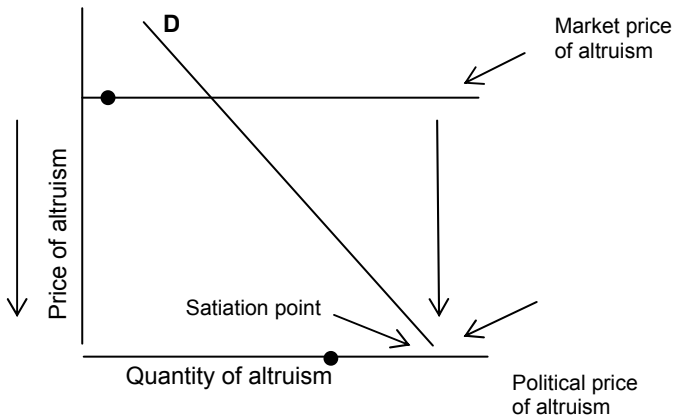
4.2a. The issue of imperfect altruism

Regarding altruism, Caplan shows that rational irrational individuals are actually altruists: "voters are not selfishly motivated. The self-interested voter hypothesis – SIVH – is false. In the political arena, voters focus primarily on national well-being, not personal well-being" (Caplan, 2006: pp.148,149) and "Good intentions are ubiquitous in politics; what is scarce is accurate beliefs" (Caplan, 2006: p.157). Apparently, from the above mentioned coexistence of altruism and rational irrationality but also from the conclusion of the altruistic voting model (presented in the second section of this paper) we could infer the conclusion that Caplan's model makes the prediction that people vote according to their selfless-irrational beliefs. This conclusion would be supported (under certain

conditions which I discuss below) both in Jankovski (2002, 2007) and in Edlin, Gelman, Kaplan (2007) interpretations of altruism. Therefore either we decompose B as $B_{ego} + \alpha B_{soc}$ (Edlin, Gelman, Kaplan, 2007) or as $B_1 + B_2$ (Jankowski, 2002), apparently Caplan's model of rational irrational selfless voting leads to a conclusion which is consistent with observable facts: individuals vote according to their rational-irrational beliefs.

Caplan's altruism has however some features and it should be analyzed whether they can lead to a conclusion contrary to that of the previous paragraph. As in the case of irrationality, Caplan shapes altruism as a consumption good: "first, altruism and morality generally are consumption goods like any other, so we should expect people to buy more altruism when the price is low. Second, due to the low probability of decisiveness, the price of altruism is drastically cheaper in politics than in the markets. Voting to raise your taxes by a thousand dollars when your probability of decisiveness is 1 in a 100.000 has an expected cost of a penny" (Caplan, 2006: p.150). This idea is illustrated in Figure 2, below.

Figure 2: The price of Altruism in Markets versus Politics



Source: Caplan, 2000: p.151

The price of altruism in what concerns political decisions is therefore zero (intersection of line **D** with the quantity axis), while the price of altruism in what concerns economic decisions is much higher. Based on this price, the amount of altruism acquired on the market is expected to be low, while in the political choices it is expected to be much higher⁸.

The altruism Caplan described was later labeled by Elster and Landemore (2008) as equivalent to Andreoni's (1989, 1990) warm-glow altruism or selfish-altruism. Starting from this observation⁹, the next step in analyzing Caplan's model is to examine rational irrationality in relation to the types of altruism identified by Andreoni (1989, 1990). Subsequently, starting from the analysis developed by Andreoni and Jankowski (2002, 2007) we should be able to determine whether rational irrationality is compatible with (altruistic) voting. (*i.e.* which of the types of altruism imply that individuals vote).

Andreoni (1990) has proposed a simple model¹⁰ in order to distinguish between two important types of altruism based on the following formula of impure altruism: $U_i = U_i(x_i, G, g_i)$, $i = 1, \dots, n$, where the utility of individual i depends on his consumption of a private good x_i and on his contribution to the total quantity of a public good G and on his private contribution to the public good g_i and on his private contribution to the public good g_i and on his private contribution to the public good g_i .

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), the total quantity of a public good G and on his private contribution to the public good g_i .

$$G = \sum_{i=1}^n g_i$$

contribution to the public good g_i), with G (the sum of all individual contributions that constitute the public good). Based on this formula, Andreoni differentiate between pure altruism: $U_i = U_i(x_i, G)$ and pure egoism: $U_i = U_i(x_i, g_i)$. To move further, some clarifications are needed: First, Andreoni (1989) differentiate between pure altruism and warm-glow altruism/selfish altruism. The difference between these two types of altruism resides in the invariance to the donor's identity of the wealth created by the act of donation. In other words, a pure altruist is

⁸ The idea is not new, being also presented by Tullock (1971) and Brennan, Lomasky (1985).

⁹ And without taking into account Elster and Landemore's (2008) criticism.

¹⁰ I do not insist here on its details since they are rather irrelevant for my argument.

concerned only with the amount of goods that the receiver gets and not with the identity of the donor, while a warm-glow altruist is not concerned with the total amount of goods received, but with the identity of the donor – I can feel good about myself because my donation proved me that I am a good man and I cannot get this feeling from the fact that others donate – this feeling is dependent exclusively on my donation.

Starting only from Caplan’s description of rational-irrational altruism, it seems difficult to assess if the latter could be labeled as warm-glow altruism as Elster and Landemore claimed. However Caplan offered at least two explanations that could shed some light on the type of altruism that he had in mind. The first is about the altruistic motivation of millionaire actors from Hollywood, which is designed to “enhance their self-image” (Caplan, 2006: p.151). An additional argument for labeling rational irrational voters as warm-glow altruists is given by the way the rational irrationality concept is internally built: voters “are not selfish in the conventional sense of trying to maximize their wealth or income. [...] they choose their political beliefs based on psychological benefits to themselves, ignoring the costs to society. (Caplan, 2006: p.229). This position seems to indicate that although people can be altruists when voting, altruism would be selected for selfish reasons – it would produce psychological benefits for those who ‘donate’ by voting. In other words, the invariance to the identity of the donor is not satisfied. Assuming that by this we determined that Caplan’s voters are rational-irrational warm-glow altruists, it only remains to be determined whether this is sufficient to generate a possibility result when it comes to turnout. There are two cases that can be studied starting from Jankowski (2002): the first case, where warm-glow altruism is independent of pure altruism, with the

formula: $U_i = \frac{P[B_1+B_2]}{2} - C + D + W$; and the second case, where warm-glow altruism is dependent on pure altruism with the formula:

$U_i = \frac{P[B_1+B_2+W]}{2} - C + D$. In these two formulas B_1 is the purely selfish benefit, B_2 is the purely altruistic benefit, W is the warm-glow altruism, and D is the factor introduced by Riker and Ordeshook (1968) to capture mainly civic duty¹¹. In the first case, both W and D are independent of P ’s effect. Temporarily ignoring the D factor which has not been since now the object of my analyses, it could be said that W and B_2 are sufficient (together but also separately) to generate a

¹¹ This is a deliberate simplification of the term D . Additionally in a later section of this paper I will explore the expressive meaning of D . For other meanings of D , Riker and Ordeshook (1968: p.28) should be consulted.

possibility result (people should vote). The argument is quite simple: in respect to B_a , "if the net benefit to others from candidate A's program is

\$1 billion in extra welfare expenditure, then even if $P = \frac{1}{100,000,000}$, the expected benefit (\$5) will exceed the costs of voting" (Jankowski, 2002: p.64). Regarding the W factor, its effect is obvious: almost any factor that is not under the influence of P (it is not multiplied by P) has the nature of counter-balancing C , because the value of this latter factor is usually very small in all democracies. In the second case (*i.e.* the second formula), W has instrumental value – it depends on the outcome of the donation and not on the act of donation in itself – and becomes dependent of P (it is multiplied by P) which means that its effect is severely muted. Since the value of W is, by definition, much smaller than the value of B_a , in this case "it is pure altruism rather than warm-glow altruism that has the dominant impact on the voting decision" (Jankowski, 2002: p.65). So in this second case if rational irrationality is compatible only with warm-glow altruism, then Caplan's model is inconsistent *i.e.* such individuals would have little reason to vote. This conclusion, however, requires further clarification. A first observation is that the instrumental interpretation of warm-glow altruism could be considered to deviate from Andreoni's (1989) definition of this class of altruism: "the warm-glow is an increasing function of what is given" (Andreoni, 1989: p.1449) and not of what is received! In other words, this benefit would be invariant to the decisiveness of donation – I feel good about myself, not because X has received something from me, but because I donated. I don't really care if X really received something as long as I have proved myself, by donating (*i.e.* voting for a transfer) that I am a good, generous, admirable man. In Andreoni's view, W appears to be a non-instrumental factor, therefore only the first of Jankowski's (2002) formula would comprise Andreoni's warm-glow altruism. That being the case, four things are left to be clarified to have a complete analysis of the matter: a) Is the second interpretation of W (Jankowski's interpretation - denoted by W_j) a legitimate category? It is clearly analytically distinct from Andreoni's interpretation of (W_a) but this does not by itself disqualify this new notion of warm-glow altruism for a thoroughly discussion about its relation with rational irrationality. b) Does Caplan's altruism fit into W_a or W_j ? c) Is rational irrationality consistent with pure altruism? d) Are expressive motivations a way that could help rational irrationality to cancel the effect of P ? I will address all these problems in the next section.

4.2b Instrumental warm-glow altruism and expressive motivations

First, W_a and W_j should be given a natural language expression. W_a could be translated into: "I care about the donor's identity, but not about the donation's decisiveness" while W_j could be translated as: "I care about the donor's identity and about the donation's decisiveness". Whether W_j is or is not an intuitive condition, it is arguable at the same extent as in the case of W_a – the individuals falling into W_j class seem as credible¹² as those falling into W_a and since there is no analytical reason to reject W_j 's possibility, it could be accepted. Once W_j 's legitimacy is accepted (at least on analytic grounds if not also for ontological reasons) the possibility of inconsistency reopens because, at first glance, Caplan does not provide sufficient detail to allow us to be completely sure whether rational irrationality fits into W_a or W_j . Luckily this is just an appearance. Returning to Caplan's view of P being zero or near zero it could be argued that connecting decisive altruism with rational irrationality it is not in the spirit of Caplan's theory: If I know that I could not be decisive ($P = 0$) at the first level (choosing beliefs), then (provided inter-level invariance) I will keep this knowledge of P also at the lower level which means that the only possible form of altruism is W_a . W_j would not be possible because I could not extract utility from this kind of altruism, as long as it depends on P which can be zero and as long as pure altruism does not seem consistent with rational irrationality¹³. This being the case, Caplan's model seems to be consistent.

But besides W_a , there is another term that could save Caplan's model from the charge of inconsistency. In the second section of this paper I have discussed two alternatives deemed viable to solve the paradox of the calculus of voting model (without giving up the principle of utility maximization): the altruistic and expressive voting. Since the altruism solution in relation to rational irrationality was already explored, it remains debatable whether expressive voting would be consistent with the fundamentals of Caplan's model.

¹² I propose this ad hoc solution because it enables assessing the impact of both cases on electoral participation. Of course in the end, this problem can only be empirically solved.

¹³ This conclusion seems to follow from the very definition of rational irrationality as instrumentally selfish (Caplan, 2006: p.229)

I mentioned above that in its W_a form, W is analytically indistinct from the term D , and I noted one of the main meanings this latter term has been given – *i.e.* civic duty. Another meaning that Riker and Ordeshook (1968: p.28) mentioned is the expression of partisan preferences. In (2006) Caplan shows that his model is closely related to that of expressive voting. This relationship can be interpreted in two ways. First rational-irrational individuals could choose beliefs of some kind, but also they could choose not to express them because they don't get satisfaction from expressing beliefs but just from having them. In this case expressive voting and rational irrationality seem distinct and we could not legitimately add an expressive component to the rational irrationality in order to counterbalance p.¹⁴ Second, individuals may have an irrational belief that they may wish to express. In this case the rational irrational and the expressive considerations are analytically indistinct: 'I think the Tooth Fairy would be a good President (for me) and I express this belief by voting for her even if she is not on the agenda'¹⁵ In this example I would choose an irrational belief because its material costs are zero and I would choose to express it by voting. This case could not fall in the class of W_a because the reasons are selfish (I think about my benefits in voting the Tooth Fairy). If this would be compatible with the rational irrationality model, then in addition to W_a there would be an expressive rational irrational term (let's label it as D_i) which could nullify the P term. This sense of a connection between rational irrationality and expressive motivations seem to be in Caplan's spirit: "expressive voters do not embrace dubious or absurd beliefs about the world. They simply care more about how policies sound than how they work. [...] In contrast, rationally irrational voters believe that feel-good policies work (Caplan, 2006: p.139). This statement concerns a non-analytical difference between expressiveness and rational irrationality. In this case the difference would be psychological, not behavioral. If this interpretation is correct, then it seems legitimate to add D_i into a 'caplanian' (*i.e.* one that Caplan would accept) equation of voting. In this interpretation, be it about W_a or D_i , Caplan's model seems to be consistent with voting.

¹⁴ Individuals may derive utility from having a particular belief but not from expressing it.

¹⁵ Let's say that I draw another box for her on the ballot. In this case, of course, to be decisive is not even mathematically possible.

5. Conclusion

Regarding the rational irrationality model, Wittman (2008) noted that "voters behave as if their votes were important. First, they vote, which is costly; if they thought their vote did not count, then they probably would not vote."¹⁶ (Wittman, 2008: p.372). In this paper I explored this intuition by studying several ways in which rational irrationality could be connected with the problem of electoral participation. The first of these, instrumental egoism is explicitly rejected by Caplan. The second, pure altruism seems inconsistent with how Caplan defines choice over beliefs (and over altruism). The third, the non-instrumental warm-glow altruism (W_{1a}) seems to be consistent with voting, while (the fourth) warm-glow instrumental altruism (W_{1i}), although it is rather inconsistent with voting, does not seem to be the kind of altruism Caplan had in mind. Based on these observations, a caplanian equation of voting should probably contain the term W_a and eventually the term D_i (both terms are independent of p). Separately but also together, these terms are intended to offset the effect of p and C . Therefore, in a particular interpretation, Caplan's rational irrationality is compatible with voting¹⁷. This paper concludes that although Caplan's model has many open doors through which significant criticism could enter, it also has some exits through which rational irrationality could be evacuated from the path of inconsistency allegations.

¹⁶ Elster and Landemore (2008) expressed a similar intuition.

¹⁷ The criticism intuited by Wittman (2008) considered only instrumental egoism, which Caplan keeps only at the level of choice of beliefs and not at the level of voting. At this later level Caplan uses either non-instrumentally warm-glow altruism or a modified version of expressive voting.

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