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The informational role of prices¹

Eirik Romstad

Norwegian University of Life Sciences, As, Norway

Summary

The paper extends the framework of prices beyond the standard market setting to incorporate public goods and natural resources. These are settings where one does not usually think of market solutions. Core theory has established that price-taking behaviour by both suppliers and consumers, i.e. the absence of strategic considerations, greatly improves the informational value of prices, and hence of economic equilibria. This also holds when using market-like institutions to allocate resources for public goods. Policy effectiveness in many areas can be improved when agents are induced to reveal, voluntarily and truthfully, their willingness-to-pay or production costs.

Keywords: rational expectations, equilibria, mechanism design, asymmetric information

JEL classification: D40, H40, Q00

1. Introduction

'To act on the belief that we possess the knowledge and the power which enable us to shape the processes of society entirely to our liking, knowledge which in fact we do not possess, is likely to make us do much harm' (von Hayek, 1989: 7). Von Hayek therefore emphasised the role of prices for conveying information. The value of von Hayek's insights has been reasserted many times. A recent case pertains to the impacts on food market prices caused by the increased attention to biofuels. The large price increases for some food commodities like corn and grains in the summer and fall of 2007 strengthened the doubts about first-generation biofuels being part of an optimal solution to avoid global climate change.

At one of the first economics conferences I attended many years ago, there was a heated debate on the validity of contingent valuation estimates. Critics of contingent valuation pointed to the fact that these estimates fluctuated from one study to another. My academic grandfather, Alan Randall, then rhetorically asked 'Why do economists like prices?' Alan did not wait for a

¹ This title has already been used before by Sanford Grossman (1989) in him a great book that has inspired much of my research in this area. I am grateful to him for allowing me to use the title in this presidential address.

² This is von Hayek's 1974 lecture when he was awarded the Swedish National Bank's Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel, which was published by the American Economic Review in 1989.

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The Informational Role Of Prices

Eirik Romstad

The Informational Role Of Prices:

The Informational Role of Prices Sanford J. Grossman, 1989 A uniform framework for understanding how prices convey information in securities markets On the Informational Role of Prices in Financial Markets Xiaojuan (Grace) Hu,2008 We examine how an increase in the number of information sources affects traders welfare and their information acquisition decisions We show that as the number of information sources increases the informativeness of market prices decreases As a result more traders choose to acquire information In addition traders ex ante utilities decrease The Informational Role of Prices Eirik Romstad, 2010 The paper extends the framework of prices beyond the standard market setting to incorporate public goods and natural resources These are settings where one does not usually think of market solutions Core theory has established that price taking behaviour by both suppliers and consumers i e the absence of strategic considerations greatly improves the informational value of prices and hence of economic equilibria This also holds when using market like institutions to allocate resources for public goods Policy effectiveness in many areas can be improved when agents are induced to reveal voluntarily and truthfully their willingness to pay or production costs **Prices and Knowledge** Esteban F. Thomsen, 2002-01-22 The growth of information economics has lead to a substantial re consideration of the role of prices Instead of the conventional neo classical view of prices as straightforward indicators of scarcity information economics emphasises that prices can be sources from which agents infer information and means by which they communicate Prices and Knowledge analyses different theoretical approaches to the role of prices in situations of imperfect information It shows that whilst the informational efficiency approach of Grossman and Stiglitz and the bounded rationality theory of Nelson and Simon are useful neither goes far enough in considering situations of disequilibrium **Marketing Information Systems** The Elgar Companion to Austrian Economics P. J. Boettke, 1998-01-01 The book can be Lee E. Preston, 1964 recommended both to those who know something about Austrian economics already and to those who know nothing David Simpson Economic Affairs Mr Boettke's very readable compendium consists of short articles by mostly young scholars selected to illustrate the diversity and fecundity of modern Austrian economics Michael Prowse The Financial Times The Elgar Companion to Austrian Economics is a major new reference work which highlights the common ground between all the branches of the school while demonstrating the breadth and diversity within it The Companion reflects the many areas where Austrian economists have made contributions including technical economics methodology of the social sciences political theory and political science This book includes contributions from an international group of scholars whose work demonstrates a basic similarity and interest in questions which have historically been associated with the Austrian approach to economics although many of the contributors would not consider themselves to be strictly of this school The distinguished team of contributors commissioned by the editor includes K D Hoover I M Kirzner A Klamer D Lavoie C K Rowley M Rizzo M Rutherford R E Wagner U Witt L Yeager Each entry is fully referenced and includes suggestions for further readings on the

topic The Companion will be the standard reference work for all those engaged in the field of Austrian Economics It not only introduces students to the Austrian school but also serves as an important research tool for scholars working within the Austrian tradition The Handbook of Experimental Economics John H. Kagel, Alvin E. Roth, 2020-05-05 This book which comprises eight chapters presents a comprehensive critical survey of the results and methods of laboratory experiments in economics. The first chapter provides an introduction to experimental economics as a whole with the remaining chapters providing surveys by leading practitioners in areas of economics that have seen a concentration of experiments public goods coordination problems bargaining industrial organization asset markets auctions and individual decision making The work aims both to help specialists set an agenda for future research and to provide nonspecialists with a critical review of work completed to date Its focus is on elucidating the role of experimental studies as a progressive research tool so that wherever possible emphasis is on series of experiments that build on one another The contributors to the volume Colin Camerer Charles A Holt John H Kagel John O Ledyard Jack Ochs Alvin E Roth and Shyam Sunder adopt a particular methodological point of view the way to learn how to design and conduct experiments is to consider how good experiments grow organically out of the issues and hypotheses they are designed to investigate The Social Science of Hayek's The Sensory Order William N. Butos, 2010-03-04 Examines the relevance and significance of Hayek's cognitive psychology for economics and social science Information and Learning in Markets Xavier Vives, 2010-01-25 The ways financial analysts traders and other specialists use information and learn from each other are of fundamental importance to understanding how markets work and prices are set This graduate level textbook analyzes how markets aggregate information and examines the impacts of specific market arrangements or microstructure on the aggregation process and overall performance of financial markets Xavier Vives bridges the gap between the two primary views of markets informational efficiency and herding and uses a coherent game theoretic framework to bring together the latest results from the rational expectations and herding literatures Vives emphasizes the consequences of market interaction and social learning for informational and economic efficiency He looks closely at information aggregation mechanisms progressing from simple to complex environments from static to dynamic models from competitive to strategic agents and from simple market strategies such as noncontingent orders or quantities to complex ones like price contingent orders or demand schedules Vives finds that contending theories like informational efficiency and herding build on the same principles of Bayesian decision making and that irrational agents are not needed to explain herding behavior booms and crashes As this book shows the microstructure of a market is the crucial factor in the informational efficiency of prices Provides the most complete analysis of the ways markets aggregate information Bridges the gap between the rational expectations and herding literatures Includes exercises with solutions Serves both as a graduate textbook and a resource for researchers including financial analysts An Entrepreneurial **Theory of the Firm** Frederic Sautet, 2000-05-11 This original provocative work encompasses a wealth of existing literature

and leads it in a new direction theory of the firm	It will inspire economic s	scholars particularly w	ithin the fields of Austr	rian economies and the

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