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Some differences in revealed behaviour under different inquiry methods

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SOME DIFFERENCES IN REVEALED BEHAVIOUR UNDER DIFFERENT INQUIRY METHODS

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Abstract: The experiment presented in this paper has two aims, both methodological. First, we want to check for the role of what we may call (after Carpenter *et al.,* 2006) the *they came to play effect*. Second, we want to test whether the lab outcomes are confirmed by a questionnaire on a hypothetical similar scenario. In order to pursue our aims, we design an experiment made of four treatments: a lab-experiment with strategy method, a lab-experiment without strategy method, a questionnaire with strategy method and a questionnaire without strategy method. We may conclude that the lab results are definitively more reliable than the questionnaire ones only if you manage, in one way or the other, to get rid of the bias induced by the *they came to play effect*: a post-experiment questionnaire, containing explicit questions on the matter, *may* be a device.

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1. Introduction

The experiment presented in this paper has two aims, both methodological.

First, we want to check for the role of what we may call (after Carpenter *et al.,* 2006) the *they came to play effect* (from now on, CTPE). In previous experiments[1] it proved to produce seriously misleading results, if not adequately considered. For reasons discussed below, its influence may arguably be different if the strategy method is adopted in the experiment or not; hence we replicated our experiments with and without the strategy method. As we will see, CTPE proved again to be relevant, while as for the results with or without the strategy method, they are not clear enough to allow for any conclusion.

Second, we want to test whether the lab outcomes are confirmed by a questionnaire on a hypothetical similar case. The lab approach involves (in our setting) real labour supply and real money, but may be affected by a "lab bias" – few cases observed, small payoffs, unrealistic setting (and, again, the insidious CTPE). On the other side, the questionnaire allows realistic settings and high stakes, but at the price of the "hypothetical bias": the setting is more *realistic,* but less *real* (to use Read's wording, 2005)[2]. If the two settings provide the same result, this would strengthen not only the results themselves, but also the validity of both methods. Then quite a number of problems could be solved, for example when the lab results are quite clear-cut, but the small number of cases does not guarantee an acceptable statistical significance (an example of such a case is presented below). If not, however, the researcher must decide which tool to reject. In our case, we obtained a result that confirms the experimental approach, while disclaiming the questionnaire-based one. Albeit the case is quite representative, we cannot obviously infer general conclusions from it.

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[1] Ortona et al. (2007)
[2] See Laury and Holt (2002) for an introductory discussion.

2. The design

The experiment is made of 4 treatments: a lab-experiment with strategy method, a lab-experiment without strategy method, a questionnaire with strategy method and a questionnaire without strategy method. In the experiment participants had to perform a secretarial task: to copy name, surname, matriculation number and final mark of fictitious students. In the lab-experiment with the strategy method we submitted two contracts: contract SN (State of Nature) and contract WS (Welfare State). After some training tasks, the participants had to choose the number of tasks they want to perform under each contract and then they were randomly assigned to one of them (1/3 of the players to contract SN, 2/3 to contract WS). In the lab-experiment without the strategy method either contract SN or contract WS was submitted, and the participants were asked to indicate the number of blocs they wanted to copy under the assigned contract.

In contract SN each bloc of 6 names was paid 1 euro, but there was a 1/6 probability of losing half of the payoff (if the result was 2 in casting two dice), and a 1/36 probability of losing the whole of it (if the result was 7 in casting cast two dice). Contract WS was the same as contract SN, but participants had to pay an income tax (with a 50% tax rate). The tax revenue was used firstly to refund the unlucky ones, and the remainder was equally redistributed among all the participants involved in that contract.

A fine of the 50% of the payoff was assigned to those who performed less tasks than they had chosen. All the previous information was common knowledge. There was no time constraint and there was no show-up fee[3]. At the end of each session the participants were requested to answer some questions about their social and political ideas.

The questionnaire replicated the lab-experiment in an ideal context. Obviously, people knew that they had not to really perform the task. They only received the description of the job. Moreover, we fixed a time constraint. They had to choose the number of blocs they would copy if they had to work for twelve weeks.

Overall, 249 people participated in the experiment: 31 in the lab-experiment with the strategy method, 92 in the questionnaire with the strategy method, 31 and 32 in the lab-experiment without the strategy method (respectively under contract SN and contract WS), and again 31 and 32 in the questionnaire without the strategy method (respectively under contract SN and contract WS). All the sessions were ran at the Laboratory EELAB of the University of Milan-Bicocca.

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[3] The same experimental structure was employed in Ortona et al. (2007) and in Ottone and Ponzano (2007).

3. They-come-to play, strategy method and questionnaire: where we stand

Carpenter *et al.* (2006) have been the first (and to our knowledge, the ones so far) to pay explicit attention to CTPE. In a double-blind dictator game, they convincingly interpret the results obtained as due to the willingness of the participants simply to play, largely irrespectively of the payoff. To our opinion, this nonchalance towards the features of the experiment may easily be due to other characteristics as well, like the willingness to gain as much as possible, the pre-committed decision about the time to be spent in the lab, a reference expected payment and so on. It ensues that the effect of CTPE *may* be different with and without the strategy method (SM). The subjects may be induced to try to choose the "optimal" choice according to what they think the experimenter would appreciate, the theory suggests, or whatever. For instance, Sutter and Weck-Hannemann (2002) and Swenson (1988) find, with the SM, that the labour supply is reduced if the tax rate on the wage is increased. Possibly, subjects actually would not reduce it, or reduce it in a different way, because of the CTPE; but they may find it "irrational" not to reduce the labour supply in presence of an increase in the tax rate, which suggests instead to reduce it. Therefore, their results may be biased towards an unduly differentiated behaviour. It may be added that the experimental literature on possible pitfalls of the strategy method is remarkably slim, and the theoretical one is substantially lacking. Roth (1995, p.322-323) suggests that the SM has two basic inconveniences, i.e. (a) "it removes from experimental observation the possible effects of the timing of decisions in the course of the game", and (b) "it forces subjects to think about each information set in a different way than if they could primarily concentrate on those information sets that arise in the course of the game ...[this] amounts to a considerable change in the game itself". Cason and Mui (1998) add some psychological doubts: the necessity to make all the choices in the same moment modifies the very mental processing, and induces the subjects to assign little attention to every single alternative[4]. Finally, Brandts and Charness (2000) observe the reactions to other subjects' favorable or unfavorable choices, and again find no difference in the with/without SM settings. What is relevant for our research is that none of these papers allow for the possibility that some (or all) subjects may be affected by CTPE; while it is reasonable to suspect that in the frames of Roth and Cason and Mui it may actually influence the choice.

Contrary to the cases of SM and CTPE, the literature on the relative performance of hypothetical but realistic settings (typically, questionnaires) and of real but peculiar ones (experiments) is large, and the debate is thriving. Many scholars probably agree with the attitude suggested by Laury and Holt (2002), "performance based incentives should be used in economics experiments, and results motivated by

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[4] They find no experimental evidence of SM distorting the results.

hypothetical incentives should be interpreted with caution". However, this opinion is by no means universal. It looks more likely that the majority shares the opinion of Read (2005) that "experiments [...] do not give overwhelming support to the claim that non-incentivized studies are unreliable, although [...] incentives [...] are more likely to decrease than to increase anomalies". The opinion of Hertwig and Ortmann (Hertwig and Ortmann, 2001; Ortmann and Hertwig, 2006) is not that different, despite the polemic among the three: they suggest that the choice of the tool should be made on the basis of the specific setting, also because "we still [...] have relatively little firm knowledge of the effects of incentives" (2006, p.7). In both contributions, Hertwig and Ortmann suggest, if possible, to "do-it-both-ways", i.e. to use *both* a questionnaire and incentives. This is what we did. In our experiment we consider a factor (the political orientation) that may be relevant in quite a number of choices, and arguably is in the context under exam. It results that this factor affects the choice in the questionnaire (in the foreseeable direction), but has no effect in the experiment. To our opinion, this is a good piece of evidence for the debate on the role of incentives; it obviously speaks in favour of the incentive approach. Results are detailed in section 5.

4. CTPE: Pay attention to it.

Our previous experiment showed that, within a risky environment, subjects do not reduce their labour supply in presence of taxation (even if the tax rate is high, i. e. 50%) if the tax revenue finances a (metaphorical) welfare state that (a) preserves them from the risk of losing all or half of the income they had (hardly) worked for; and (b) it supplies a public good with what is left of the tax revenue after the "victims" of mishaps have been indemnified. We adopted the strategy method with reference to the labour contract. In substance, we asked each subject: "How much are you willing to work if the tax rate is 0 and you are not insured against risk" and "How much are you willing to work if the tax rate is 50% (or 30% in a different experimental round) and you are almost fully insured against risk". As stated above, our main result was that there was no significant difference when considering all the subjects. However, the labour supply was greater in the welfare state setting when ruling out the subjects who declared that they established their supply on the basis of the time that they had decided to devote to the experiment, as resulted from the post-experiment questionnaire[5]. We assume that these subjects are the ones affected by CTPE[6].

For the reasons outlined above, it is reasonable to guess that CTPE may be influenced by the use of the SM. Hence we replicated the experiment without resorting to it. The participants to one group were asked how much they were willing to work in a *state of nature* (no taxation and no protection in a risky environment, the same as in the previous experiment); the participants to a second group were asked how much they were willing to work in a *welfare state* (taxation at a 50% rate and almost full protection in the same risky environment)[7]. This experiment was run in a different lab and several months after the one discussed above, so we replicated the strategy method setting too, to get rid of possible framing and pooling effects. The subjects who "came to play" were again identified as those who stated, in the post-exp questionnaire, that they decided what to do in the lab "only on the basis of the time they had previously decided to devote to the experiment". As the following tables show, there were quite a number of subjects of this kind. The results (see table I) were:

a) *With the strategy method,* most subjects (17 out of 31) provide the same labour supply in the state of nature and in the welfare state, while exactly the same number (7 and 7) supply more labour in each of the two settings. The average labour supply (26 tasks) is also the same.

[5] The result confirms the theoretical claim and the cross-section analysis of Bird (2001).
[6] See Ortona et. al. (2007) for detailed results.

However, the behaviors become different if we exclude those who "came to play": 11 out of 13 subjects of this kind provide the same supply, against 6 out of 18 for the other ones (p=0.009, Fischer-exact test).

Table I

Comparing choices with and without the Strategy Method

Average Labour Supply→ Method ↓	SN	WS
With SM	26	26
Without SM	27.2	30.6

b) *Without the strategy method* in the lab, the average labour supply is higher in the welfare state (30.6 vs. 27.2). This difference is not significant (Mann-Whitney test, $p = 0.25$); nor it is if we distinguish between subjects affected and not affected by CTPE. Note that the first type is again numerous, but less than with the SM: 10 out of 31 and 5 out of 32 in SN and WS respectively. In both settings, the difference in the average labour supply between CTP subjects and non-CTP subjects is not significant (Mann-Whitney test, $p = 0.87$ and $p = 0.25$ respectively). These results suggest that the CTPE may be affected by the use of the strategy method; we do not have data enough to go further.

To sum up, in our experiment the CTPE affected a high share of subjects, proved relevant and misleading in at least one setting out of two, and possibly affects the results obtained with the strategy method. Consequently, our conclusion on the relevance of CTPE effect is that for the type of experiments where it may produce, like those involving real effort, great attention should be paid to its possible role. Subjects who decided in advance how much time they were willing to devote to the experiment (and hence how much labour to supply) tend to stick to their decision irrespectively of the contract features.

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[7] The terms *welfare state* and *state of nature* were not employed in the instructions; the wording was neutral.

5. Questionnaires: not the same results as the experiments

As described above**,** a group of subjects not participating in the experiment, but coming from the same students' cohort, received a questionnaire asking how much labour they would be willing to supply in a "real" job, lasting for some months and with a realistic pay. The contract features and the risk were the same as in the lab. The only difference was that the public good was supposed to be a redistribution among the whole population of a country[8].

   At first sight, *with the strategy method* the questionnaire and the lab provide the same outcome as for the labour supply, but for the number of subjects that declared the same willingness to work under both contracts (see table II)[9].

Table II

With Strategy Method

Number of tasks →	>SN	>WS	SN=WS	Total
For real	7	7	17	31
Questionnaire	31	29	32	92

p = 0.14, chi-square test.

Without the strategy method, in the questionnaire, the average labour supply was substantially the same under both contracts (table III).

Table III

Without Strategy Method

	SN	WS
For real	24	28
Questionnaire	439.8	427.4

Comparing SN/WS. In the lab experiment: Mann-Whitney test ➔ p = 0.09: the difference is significant.

In the questionnaire: t-test ➔ p = 0.827. the difference is not significant.

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[8] In principle, this should not be a problem. In fact, in the experiment, we have, at least, 20 participants. It follows that the marginal benefit due to redistribution for each player is very low, as we show in the appendix.

[9] Approximately 1/3 of the subjects declared that they would supply more labour in the welfare state, 1/3 that they would supply more labour in the state of nature, and 1/3 that they would supply the same amount of labour under both contracts. The last share is significantly lower than in the lab (where it is more than a half), thus confirming the presence in the experiment of the "they came to play" effect.

A closer inspection, however, revealed an interesting difference: the choices taken by those who responded the questionnaire is significantly affected by their political orientation, with leftists and centrists working more in the welfare state and rightists in the state of nature, as one could expect. This is true *both* for the questionnaire with the strategy method (table IV) and for that without it (table V)[10]. Remarkably, center-oriented people declare a greater labour supply in the welfare state if there is no strategy method, but *not* if the strategy method allows for the same amount, arguably as a way to implement the political orientation.

Table IV

Labour Supply→ Political Orientation ↓	>SN	>WS	SN=WS	Total
Left	2	**11**	10	23
Center	12	10	**13**	35
Right	**17**	8	8	33
Total	31	29	31	91

p = 0.022, chi-square test

Table V

Average Labour Supply→ Political Orientation ↓	SN	WS
Left	-	-
Center	276.7 (1)	492.2 (2)
Right	598 (3)	391.1 (4)

Comparing (1) and (2)→ Mann Whitney test: p = 0.0153

Comparing (3) and (4)→ Mann Whitney test: p = 0.0073

Comparing (1) and (3)→ Mann Whitney test: p = 0.0012

Comparing (2) and (4)→ Mann Whitney test: p = 0.27

However, what is most noticeable is that the political orientation *has no effect* in the lab, but for a small effect for *centrist* people. Data are in table VI for the experiment with the strategy method, in table VII for the same experiment with the exclusion of subjects who "came to play"[11], in table VIII for

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[10] In this case there were only 5 leftist people; but the tendency for centrist and rightist ones is clear.

[11] I.e., the subjects who in the post-exp questionnaire declared that they decided what to do only on the basis of the time they wanted to stay in the lab.

the experiment without the strategy method, and in table IX for the experiment without the strategy method and without subjects who "came to play".

Table VI

Labour Supply→ Political Orientation ↓	>SN	>WS	SN=WS	Total
Left	2	0	4	6
Center	0	4	5	9
Right	3	2	4	9
Total	5	6	13	24

p = 0.18, Fisher-exact test

Table VII

Labour Supply→ Political Orientation ↓	>SN	>WS	SN=WS	Total
Left	2	0	1	3
Center	0	4	3	7
Right	2	2	1	5
Total	4	6	5	15

p = 0.21, Fisher-exact test.

Table VIII

	SN	WS
Left **(N = 11)**	30.7 (1)	22 (4)
Center **(N = 24)**	21.5 (2)	27.5 (5)
Right **(N = 24)**	25 (3)	33.4 (6)

Comparing (1), (2) and (3), Kruskal – Wallis test: p = 0.486. Comparing (4), (5) and (6): p = 0.662. Comparing (1) with (4), (2) with (5) and (3) with (6), the only significant difference is for centrist people, who work more in the WS setting. (Mann-Whitney test, p = 0.448, p= 0.079 and p = 0.267 respectively).

Table IX

	SN	WS
Left (N = 7)	24.5 (1)	17.7 (4)
Center (N = 18)	22.3 (2)	28.2 (5)
Right (N = 21)	27.1 (3)	33.4 (6)

Comparing (1), (2) and (3), Kruskal – Wallis test: $p = 0.607$. Comparing (4), (5) and (6): $p = 0.429$. Comparing (1) with (4), (2) with (5) and (3) with (6), there is no significant difference (Mann-Whitney test, $p = 0.47$, $p = 0.14$ and $p = 0.41$ respectively).

This points towards two very neat suggestions:

a) The results of questionnaires cannot be summed to those coming from the lab, as they are affected by an ideological bias (and hence, possibly also by others);

b) The ideological bias may be displaced in the lab – at least, it is in ours – to the glory of the real-incentive approach.

Note that our results add a fourth case to the three comparable ones surveyed by Camerer and Hogarth (1999), and confirm their conclusions: "the presence of incentives *does*[12] seem to affect average performance [...] in clerical tasks, which are so mundane that monetary rewards induces persistent diligence", while [...] when incentives are low, subjects say they would be more [...] generous then they actually are when incentives are increased".

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[12] Emphasis theirs.

6. A final remark.

On the other hand, the lab – when time and effort are somehow involved – is vulnerable to the "they come to play effect". Therefore, we may conclude that the lab results are definitively more reliable only if you manage, in one way or the other, to get rid of the bias induced by such an effect: a post-experiment questionnaire, containing explicit questions on the matter, *may* be a device. And, of course, provided that the lab results pass their *statistical significance exam*. In any case, the conclusions above are far from being conclusive, as they are the result of just two experimental campaigns. Yet they are very *suggestive*, and we strongly suggest our colleagues (as well as ourselves) that it is worthy to test them further under different settings.

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Mathematical appendix

In the state of nature the expected pay – off of the players is

$$W = \frac{29}{36}1 + \frac{6}{36}0.5 + \frac{1}{36}0 = \frac{32}{36}.$$

In the Welfare State we divide the expected pay-off in three parts in order to better explain our design. In particular, we consider the own revenue of the player, the insurance revenue and the redistribution revenue.

The own revenue is:

$$Wo = 0.5\left(\frac{29}{36}1 + \frac{6}{36}0.5 + \frac{1}{36}0\right) = \frac{16}{36},$$

the insurance revenue is:

$$Wi = 0.5\left(\frac{6}{36}0.4 + \frac{1}{36}0.8\right) = \frac{2}{45},$$

the redistribution revenue is:

$$Wr = \frac{W - Wo - Wi}{n}$$

where n is the number of player in the Welfare State contract. In the questionnaire n could be considered as the whole population in a country. Then, the value of Wr in the experiment where n is equal to 20 is only $\frac{1}{45}$, while it could be considered 0 in the questionnaire.

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