A BEHAVIORAL ECONOMICS APPROACH ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE: WHY DO PEOPLE OPPOSE TRADE?

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Abstract

Orthodox economics has complex models to explain international commerce and its benefits. However, commonly, people behave in manners that do not conform with the theory: international trade openness usually finds great opposition and little support. With the rational agent framework these behaviors don't make sense, but they can be explained with behavioral economics, particularly with the nudges and biases approach. The objective of this paper is to provide insights into the lack of support and extreme public resistance to international trade. This paper is structured as an empirically grounded essay, using behavioral economics to explain the divergence between the expected behavior from theory and the direct opposition of many toward trade openness. Identifying biases related to the valuation of "benefits and losses" in wellbeing and accessibility issues regarding economic models. The earnings and losses of trade are asymmetrically distributed, atomizing the first and concentrating the former. Jointly with the Prospect Theory, this could explain the extreme adverse reactions and the lack of support. On the other hand, many of the expected benefits are derived from complex theoretical models, while the stories of the harmed are self-telling, leading to accessibility issues that culminate in substitution heuristics and counterfactual reasoning.

Keywords: Behavioral economics; Commerce; Economic theory; Heuristics and biases; Rational agent; Orthodox economics; Heterodox economics.

1. Introduction

When talking about international trade, it's easy to find controversy, with statements that depart from opinions and conjectures to highly complex economic models. The orthodox economic theory proclaims trade between nations as a major promoter of development and wellbeing (Appleyard & Field, 2003; Krugman, Obstfeld, & Melitz, 2016; Parkin & Loría, 2010). Theoretically speaking, it allows greater specialization and production by exploiting

relative advantages, making it possible to reach levels of consumption unattainable to closed economies (Appleyard & Field, 2003; Krugman, Obstfeld, & Melitz, 2016; Parkin & Loría, 2010).

Due to that, a rational maximizing agent will always want to promote trade openness. Despite that, the empirical behavior of the people doesn't seem to match that prediction. In many cases, trade openness faces strong adverse reactions from different sectors, with a few supporters in others. Each of them defending their position, but aside from some "experts", most of the arguments can be qualified as non-rational in the orthodox economic sense, or at least not grounded on evidence or theory. Typically, they depart from conjectures. To add to the issue, these conjectures tend to go to the extremes; some statements are almost apocalyptic.

This explicit opposition to trade openness and the lack of support can't be explained with the rational agent model or the orthodox international trade framework. Considering this, this paper is structured as an empirically grounded essay that aims to answer the question: How can the radical opposition to trade openness be explained?

To respond to this, the paper presents two frames and later a discussion around empirical phenomena. The first frame to be presented is that of trade openness from the orthodox economics framework, to illustrate why it's supposed that people should favor international trade. Afterwards, some findings of behavioral economics are going to be presented, especially those from the heuristics and biases approach to behavioral economics. Finally, these frames are going to be used simultaneously to explain why the unrelenting opposition to international trade openness lacks sense for orthodox economics while highlighting how it can be explained from behavioral economics.

The explanations enabled by behavioral economics allow us to better understand how people perceive trade openness psychologically. Consequentially, making it easier to identify the drivers of the exaggerated adverse reactions, which could empower a better design for decision-making spaces and policies. Therefore, correcting the biases around the perception of international trade. At the same time, this paper offers a contribution to the literature by proposing a theoretical explanation for these phenomena, because current uses and exploration have been mostly practical.

2. Methodological aspects

This paper is an empirically grounded essay that analyzes the commonly observed extreme opposition and adverse reactions toward trade openness by contrasting two competing theories to explain economic behavior: the rational agent model of orthodox economics and the nudges and biases approach of behavioral economics. With the aim of integrating some findings of behavioral economics into the discussion of commerce theory.

As it stands, behavioral economics is frequently used in policy design, in some cases even in commerce policy design (like in OECD, 2017), but there aren't many papers that delve into the explanation beyond the application. That's the purpose of this paper, which is structured as an empirically grounded essay that puts forward a theoretical discussion between two competing approaches to explain economic behavior: the rational agent model and the nudges and biases approach.

To achieve this, a literature review on both approaches is carried out. The first part of this review covers the rational agent model and the analytical framework of trade openness under the orthodox approach to explain why the typical social aversion to trade lacks sense

from this framework. After this, the heuristics and biases approach to behavioral economics is inspected and used to analyze the commonly observed opposition to international trade openness.

This design offers a second advantage for economics, in epistemological terms that hasn`t been explored yet. The heuristics and biases approach focuses on examining deviations from the rational agent model of orthodox economics (Altman, 2021). But this can also be put as a falsification of the theory, in a Popperian sense, opening a new path for positive economics. At the same time, it enables Hutchinson's testing criterion, which aims to reduce the instability of the system (Hart, 2011), for example, with "nudges" (Sustein & Thaler, 2017). In general, the heuristics and biases approach intends to close the distance between the real behavior and the economically optimal one, implying a recognition of the optimal result as desirable (Altman, 2021). Making it consistent with the aim and scope of this paper.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Orthodox economics: behavior and commerce

3.1.1 Rational agent model

Orthodox economics works with the rational agent model as its basis. This model, also called Homo oeconomicus, lumps together a series of suppositions around the way people behave when facing economic issues. Its purpose is to make behavior consistent (Sen, 1977), omitting supposedly irrelevant factors (Thaler, 2015), which permits mathematical modeling and statistical prediction.

This model stipulates that humans act as utility maximizers in an intertemporal aggregated manner, meaning that every decision is oriented toward maximizing across their whole life. For this, the economic agents have probability distributions for every course of action and decide by the expected value of each, including probability distributions for the possible courses of action and probability distributions of the other agents (Kreps, 1995). This poses the degree of rationality as equivalent to the amount of probability distributions considered (Kreps, 1995).

Such a conception of rationality reduces reasoning to an instrumental device with a single function: the calculus of the expected utility of the possible actions (Dussel, 2009). By adding the revealed preference frame, it also narrows welfare to the consumption packages of goods obtained in market transactions, chosen through a well-defined, consistent, and structured preference frame, all in order to satisfy materialism and positivism demands (Dussel, 2009; Gravelle & Rees, 2006; Rodríguez-Soto, 2024). There are many critical reviews of these definitions; a paramount epistemological one surges from the impossibility of falsifying it: anything can be a utility maximization in relation to the preferences of an agent, making it tautological (Rodríguez-Soto, 2024).

The orthodoxy offers two answers to this critic: instrumentalism or taking rationality as a hypothesis instead of a supposition. The first one is the well-known "as if" of Milton Friedman, which states that even if the agents aren't economically rational, they behave as if they were so, the economic systems can be accurately described by the models built upon this agent prototype (Hinkelamert, 1970; Rodríguez-Soto, 2024). The second answer is more demure, it proposes to take economic rationality as a hypothesis, allowing to catalogue some agents or behaviors as irrational (Gravelle & Rees, 2006; Rodríguez-Soto,

2024). That enables some interesting analysis and resolves the possible tautology issue, opening the path for articulations, such as this, that try to falsify the orthodox economic theory.

Yet, it's mandatory to mention that even if the economic rationality assumptions sacrifice a great deal of descriptive power, they enable connecting theoretical and mathematical analysis to empirical data. Which allows us to create prediction models that can be used in many scenarios, from public policy formulation to the forecasting of economic issues, making its usefulness undeniable. In this sense, it can be methodologically armored on instrumentalism (Blaug, 1992; Cadwell, 1994).

3.1.2 International commerce in the orthodox economics framework

For mainstream economics, trade is a synonym for increasing social welfare. In Smith's seminal book, The Wealth of Nations ([1776]2015), there is great homage to it because it allows specialization and, therefore, better life conditions, based on the principle of absolute advantages. Later, in 1817, Ricardo formulated the theory of comparative advantages, expanding the benefits of commerce to opportunity costs (Appleyard & Field, 2003).

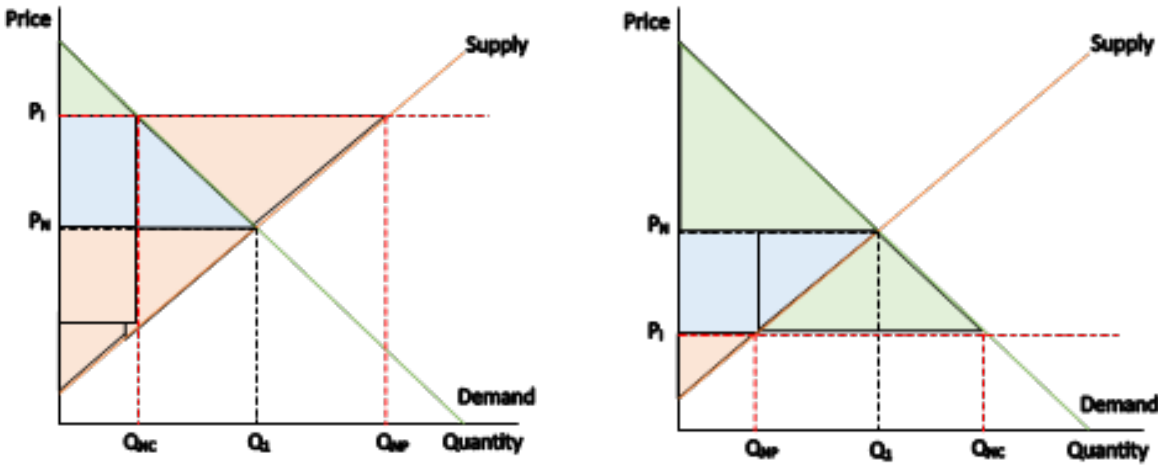
This trend of thought was extensively developed by the classics, influenced by the liberal school, due to their historical context. Some as a reaction to the strong interventions and control over economic affairs exerted, first by the theological thought during the Middle Ages, and after by the policies of the mercantilists. Even though the classics were concerned with other issues, not necessarily welfare in the sense of neoclassical economics (Blaug, 1992). During that period the discussions focused on political economy: distribution, power, and relative positions within and between nations, i.e., how wealth creates power and how power creates wealth.

There are some recent heterodox hypotheses that don't consider international trade as a natural, self-regulating, efficiency-promoting phenomenon. Dependency theory considers that some specialization patterns are rooted in power relations between nations and have deep consequences for development (Appleyard & Field, 2003). Institutional economics claims that specialization patterns are the result of historical contingencies, not the outcome of the internationally optimal allocation of resources and productive activities (Krugman, Obstfeld & Melitz, 2016).

Despite those, from here on, this paper focuses on the mainstream international trade theory, as it is the dominant one. Figure 1 synthesizes the welfare effects of international trade for orthodox economics.

In general terms, the effects of trade can be studied in two broad categories, from each side of the market: supply and demand. For supply, the effects are ambiguous, some positive and others negative, with distributive implications between sectors (Appleyard & Field, 2003; Krugman, Obstfeld, & Melitz, 2016). The industries competing with imports face difficulties because they have to face international prices that, in theory, are the lowest (Appleyard & Field, 2003; Krugman, Obstfeld, & Melitz, 2016). On the other hand, industries dedicated to exports can benefit from having bigger markets for their products (Appleyard & Field, 2003; Krugman, Obstfeld, & Melitz, 2016). There are other complexities to consider, like vertical or horizontal integration or disintegration, scale economies, specialization patterns, information problems, technical or technological asymmetries, and imperfect markets (Parada, 2013).

Figure 1 – The effects of international trade on economic welfare



Source: own elaboration

From the consumer's perspective, there is a substantial theoretical consensus on the advantages of trade. International commerce allows customers to access new markets and a great variety of goods while making them cheaper because they're facing the international prices (Appleyard & Field, 2003; Parada, 2013; Krugman, Obstfeld & Melitz, 2016). From the consumer standpoint, commerce is convenient.

This analysis can be deepened with Figure 1. When the international prices are higher than the national ones, the nation benefits from exports; this situation is represented by the graph on the left (Bernanke & Frank, 2007; Mankiw, 2013; Parkin & Loria, 2010). The colored area is the total welfare for the society, the green part is the consumer's surplus and the orange one is the producer's surplus. The blue area marks the redistribution effect from consumers, that aren't willing to buy the good at the international price to the producers that can obtain such a price by selling it outside the economy.

The other case can be appreciated in the graph on the right, when the international prices are lower than the national ones (Bernanke & Frank, 2007; Mankiw, 2013; Parkin & Loria, 2010). Again, the colored area is the total welfare for the society, and the same colors describe each surplus (consumer's and producer's). The biggest difference is in the redistribution effect; in this case, there is a redistribution in favor of the consumers, because the lower prices allow more of them to buy the good; on the other hand, this implies that the less competitive producers are left out of the market.

In aggregated terms, trade between nations should increase the welfare of the society, as it's shown by the total colored areas in Figure 1. The harms should be few in comparison to the benefits, so the welfare that is lost should be more than compensated by the increase in social wellbeing.

3.2 Behavioral economics: some findings of the heuristics and biases approach

Despite the predominance of the rational agent model, there have always been alternative models for economic behavior. For example, Keynes ([1936] 2017) used the term "animal spirits" to explain economic cycles, with the differences between real and monetary terms and psychological propensities to consume and invest (Rodríguez-Soto, 2025; World Bank

Group, 2015). Scitovsky questioned the revealed preference methodology, claiming that there are unobservable satisfactions due to intrinsic motivations (Romaniuc, 2017). Sen (1977) rescues the ideas of sympathy and compromises of Smith's The Theory of Moral Sentiments ([1759]2013). There have been attempts to assimilate psychological variables into utility maximization, like the work done by Frey and Stroebe (Romaniuc, 2017). The framework to be used in this paper is the heuristics and biases approach, which is the most compatible with the aim of falsifying the theory and explaining behaviors that deviate from the orthodox model.

To begin with, cognitive psychology has several theories to explain attention and perception (Vásquez et al., 2016). The heuristics and biases approach usually departs from the conceptualization of two types of cognitive processes for decision-making: type I and type II (Kahneman, 2003, 2012; Musso, 2020; Rodríguez-Soto, 2022). The type I processes are intuitive, fast, and close to the associative memory; they're relied on in known or recurrent situations or those of little importance. On the other hand, type II processes are slow, rational, require time and active judgment for making decisions; they're typically used in the face of new situations or in particularly relevant ones.

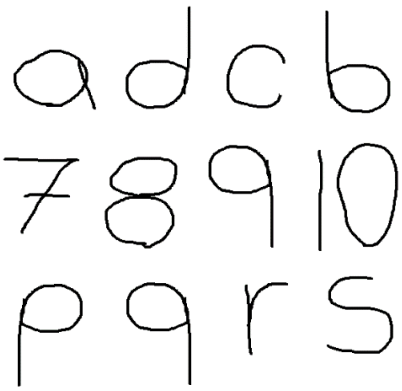
The existence of two processes for decision-making is explained by the parsimony principle on behalf of the brain: to minimize effort while maximizing execution. This cognitive model proposes a single and limited "resource" of the brain that is used to pay attention and develop tasks, making it necessary to optimize its use (Vásquez et al., 2016). But saving energy can lead to mistakes and judgment errors: heuristics and biases. A heuristic is a shortcut in problem-solving or decision-making, often based on past experiences and used via similarity to previous situations (Kahneman, 2012; Musso, 2020).

However, the application of previously successful formulas doesn't guarantee the best course of action; even when the situations are alike, they're never completely equal, which could lead to mistakes and biases (Kahneman, 2012). Here appears the role of the type II processes: to supervise the execution of the type I solutions and judge them and to solve new issues (Kahneman, 2012; Vásquez et al., 2016; Rodríguez-Soto, 2022).

This has many implications, for example, when judging the information received from others and the environment. People tend to conform with likelihood when judging the truth, meaning that if something seems plausible, it's interpreted as real (Kahneman, 2012; Rodríguez, 2022). This phenomenon relates to the accessibility of the information (Kahneman, 2003, 2012; Rodríguez-Soto, 2022). The concept of accessibility is defined as "the ease with which mental contents come to mind" (Kahneman, 2003, p. 1452), including their interpretations (Rodríguez-Soto, 2022). The concept can be better illustrated with Figure 2.

When reading Figure 2, at first glance, it's easy to read a,b,c,d, , 7,8,9,10 on the second line, and p,q,r,s on the third. Nevertheless, putting more attention into it, the symbols that read as b,d,9,p,q are exactly the same but with different dispositions and contexts; despite that, they're processed as different symbols on a quick reading. That happens because perception is contextually grounded; perceiving the table implies the competition of alternative interpretations of what's been seen. Finally, the brain selects one of those possible interpretations and presents it to the consciousness. This selection is based on the relative accessibility and plausibility of each reading, given the context. Once a "story" is chosen, the alternatives remain unconscious (Kahneman, 2012; Vásquez et al., 2016; Rodríguez-Soto, 2022).

Figure 2 – Reading by reference to context



Source: own elaboration

But the perceptual constructions are not necessarily accurate; here, prototype heuristics enter the fray (Kahneman, 2003, 2012; Rodríguez-Soto, 2022). Human beings process the world from mental models created from experience and articulated as ideological structures, combining facts, opinions, and feelings about things (Van Dijk, 2005; Rodríguez-Soto, 2022). The mental models are the prototypes or stereotypes with which humans think about categories (Kahneman, 2012). These mental prototypes are composed of relevant information usually present in each type of "object"; they categorize them and save us energy and time (Kahneman, 2003, 2012; Rodríguez-Soto, 2022). This categorization of everything occurs automatically and starts even before the stimuli are clearly perceived (Kahneman, 2003; Rodríguez-Soto, 2022).

Despite their usefulness, this kind of heuristic carries the risk of a certain type of bias: attribute substitutions. The qualities of things are judged through attributes; so, the biases appear when mistaken attributes are used as substitutes for real qualities of something or when a question is used to answer another that may not be directly related. In general, they are an attribution that substitutes information of an object with information from the perceiver's prototypes (Kahneman, 2003, 2012; Rodríguez-Soto, 2022).

They tend to occur due to accessibility problems; for example, if a property of the object is not easy to discern or in the face of incomplete information, the brain looks for a coherent manner to fill the missing information (Kahneman, 2003, 2012; Rodríguez-Soto, 2022). Those information gaps are filled using the information from the mental models (Kahneman, 2003, 2012; Rodríguez-Soto, 2022). Which is perfectly rational, since the prototypes are constructions based on regularity, meaning that they tend to be true (Kahneman, 2003, 2012; Rodríguez-Soto, 2022).

Another major divergence with the orthodox economic theory arises from the valuation of outcomes. The rational agent model proposes that humans have a series of concatenated probability distributions for the results of every action, and then they choose by selecting the one with the highest expected value. On the other hand, behavioral economics has found that that isn't the case. Experimental findings show that changes in wellbeing are evaluated separately instead of in aggregate and that the sensation of well-being is more related to the changes in states than in aggregated final outcomes (Kahneman, 2012; Thaler, 2015).

The Prospect Theory of D. Kahneman and A. Tversky describes that the evaluation of changes is not homogeneous or consistent; people perceive the effects of "losses" as approximately double than those of "wins" (Kahneman, 2012; Thaler, 2015; Altman, 2021). This leads to a degree of predisposition to risk aversion (Kahneman, 2012; Sustein & Thaler, 2017) and a preference for the status quo rather than the uncertainty of changes (Kahneman, 2012).

4. Results and discussion: analysis of empirical behavior around international trade

4.1 Traditionally observed behavior

Outside the theory and economic models, the possibility of greater commercial openness tends to encounter extreme reactions that don't fit with what should be expected from theorized welfare effects. It's possible to find arguments that go from apocalyptic levels, with claims of selling countries or generalized poverty, to others proclaiming a new era of prosperity for everyone. For example, in Mexico with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), in France with the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) or the Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement (CETA), in Central America, and especially in Costa Rica, with the Dominican Republic-Central American Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA), among others.

The extreme opposition to these trade agreements usually stems from vulnerable groups and sectors that are directly threatened by the potential commercial openness. Some argue from nationalism and how they must give up a part of their national sovereignty, as many of these agreements transcend national laws. Close to the previous one, there are allegations of food security. Others claim that the asymmetries between developed and developing countries are just too big for trade to be equal.

From the other side, the reasonings are equally extreme. The most common one is related to the efficiency and competitiveness of the economy. This one is typically coupled with modernization, innovation, foreign investment, and job creation. All the while, as the supporters claim, the prices will be lower and the variety of goods increased for all. However, history tends to show a more moderate path; neither of the extreme predictions seems to have happened.

Yet another interesting issue related to people's behavior around commercial openness is that there is a huge lack of action from the potential beneficiaries of trade. If the theoretical effects are to be believed, the entirety of society should gain from it, while relatively smaller groups are harmed. It would be anticipated that rational agents wouldn't pass on a chance to increase their wellbeing, but in reality, it looks like many of them aren't interested or willing to do something to achieve those advantages. On the contrary, the harmed few tend to be the bigger groups that mobilize themselves.

All these behaviors, extreme arguments and the inaction of most of the population, escape the explanation of orthodox economics but can be explained with behavioral economics.

4.2 How can behavioral economics explain such actions?

Regarding the tendency of the arguments to go to the extremes, it can be explained with the Prospect Theory and substitution heuristics. One of the biggest issues related to the

"winners" and "losers" of international commerce openness is the distribution of the changes in wellbeing. To put it simply, the increase of welfare atomizes across the whole society, while the losses concentrate in a few groups (Krugman, Obstfeld, & Melitz, 2016). What each "winner" earns is a minor change in prices and options, while the "losers" face a significant diminishment of wellbeing. The positive changes disperse, but the negative ones condense. It's worth mentioning that this problem appears even in the orthodox framework (Krugman, Obstfeld, & Melitz, 2016); adding the Prospect Theory makes it worse.

This theory explains that the valuations are biased toward perceived negative changes; they're felt twice as much as the positive ones. Which means that the per se concentrated losses are felt double than the essentially atomized increases in welfare. So, small groups of agents must endure the weight of the loss, and that weight is felt twice as much as an equal increase of wellbeing; on the other side, every member of society benefits with a small increase in their welfare, which is felt as half of an equal diminishment of their wellbeing. Even if the social aggregated effect is positive, its distribution makes it problematic at the individual level.

This can help to understand why the "losers" tend to overreact, while the "winners" usually don't act at all or try to promote the changes. From each agent incentive structure, there is little motivation for the "winners" to act and a great one for those negatively affected. At the same time, the emotional charges facilitate cognitive biases (Kahneman, 2003; Rodríguez, 2022) that can explain the elaborations that end in the tragic claims.

These types of streams of thought are the result of substitution heuristics, as some premises used in the reasonings aren't factual but counterfactual. This phenomenon was studied by Davis & Koutsobinas (2021): counterfactuals can be used as substitutions in reasoning. These combine facts with hypothetical arguments to arrive at a conclusion. For example, trade openness is a fact, but its consequences are hypothetical; yet, these premises, the real and the hypothetical ones, are combined to reach a conclusion, such as selling a country, bankrupting everyone, generalized poverty, etc. This, of course, is equivalent to the most optimistic claims of generalized prosperity. Such lines of thought aren't different from a new era kind of biased idea (Shiller, 2015).

Furthermore, the inaction of most of society (the beneficiaries) is reinforced by accessibility problems. The negative consequences of international commerce are pretty evident, observable, easy to relate to, and they can be expressed with eloquence. But the case of the benefits is the opposite: they derive from economic models that don't know simplicity; aside from some overly simplistic arguments. It's a well-known fact in behavioral economics that one of the most important things about a message is the story that it tells, its coherence and plausibility; as was mentioned, truth tends to be judged by consistency and coherence rather than veracity (Kahneman, 2003; 2012; Thaler, 2012; Rodríguez-Soto, 2022).

Overall, the negative consequences of trade can be easily seen, while the benefits are so atomized that they aren't easy to perceive. And even more, they aren't easy to understand: anyone can comprehend and empathize with the tragedy of a family or sector, but not many with economic theory. This leads to "identity-oriented" politics that can easily bias social decisions (Rodríguez-Soto, 2022). Meanwhile, economics technical discourse creates communication problems, which have been detected in the case of energy markets in the form of multivocacity issues (Rilinger, 2022).

There is evidence collected by the International Development Bank that proves the paramount effects that framing has on the attitudes of people towards trade and commerce (García, 2022) that supports the analysis presented. As well as interesting initiatives to try to correct the misperceptions towards international trade (OCDE, 2017). Even though this is a dangerous terrain because many strong interests and factual powers are involved; which could lead to situations of willful ignorance from agents (Jain, 2023).

5. Conclusions

Real-life behavior in the face of international trade openness dynamics cannot be satisfactorily explained with the rational agent model of orthodox economics. Most of the time there are extreme reactions, incomprehension of the issue, and flaws of reasoning that are not rational in the economic sense. These commonly observed behaviors were examined with the heuristics and biases approach of behavioral economics.

First, the gains and losses of international trade openness are distributed asymmetrically, with atomized gains and concentrated losses, which is an issue even within the orthodox economics models. When this is combined with the Prospect Theory it leads to even bigger concerns that can help to comprehend the extreme adverse reactions of the "losers" and little interest of the "winners" of international commerce. We have essentially atomized increases in welfare and condensed diminishments of wellbeing, that are asymmetrically perceived in a manner that attenuates the perception of positive effects and aggravates that of the negative ones.

Even more, the arguments are commonly biased because they depart from a mix of facts and counterfactual premises, resulting in substitution heuristics. Many arguments and discussions combine economic facts with politics to arrive at hypothetical scenarios, without any real support for their conclusions. That can elucidate why the discussions tend to go to extreme positions of absolute misery or prosperity and the lack of balanced or middle positions.

Another problem in finding supporters for trade openness lies in the cognitive accessibility of the economic arguments that are the foundation of most of the expected benefits of international trade. The overwhelming majority of them derive from complex economic models that are not intelligible for the layman in the subject, except for overly simplistic ones, like lower prices or more consumption options. On the other hand, the stories of people or sectors to be harmed by commerce are self-telling and eloquent, not to mention harsh. People tend to get emotionally involved if they can put a "face" to a story, rather than if it's about abstract concepts, like a society as a whole.

These explanations open a path to modifying the decision-making space to correct the biased behaviors. Regarding valuation, the potential gains can be made patent and presented as losses: put what's not being earned as an explicit loss; this type of strategy typically works (Kahneman, 2012). In the case of the affected sectors, they can be made aware of the costs and benefits for society; contrary to popular belief, it's been proven that people care about the difficulties they impose on others (Sustein & Thaler, 2017). For the accessibility problems, it's mandatory to de-technify economics discourse, to make it accessible for everyone. Such initiatives have already been carried out by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, with papers such as Making Trade Work for All (2018). Also, there is a huge need for education; trade openness offers opportunities,

and comprehending the economic situation enhances the chances everyone has to take the most out of them.

Finally, it's mandatory to consider the great responsibility behind introducing any type of modification in the incentive structures or decision-making spaces. Commerce may improve economic efficiency and aggregated economic outcomes, but economic rationale is not the only valid reason to take into account. There are some political economy considerations regarding the economic structure, inequality, strategic issues related to international political affairs, or even food security.

In the end, it's about human lives. Some activities have paramount importance to the development and history of some territories beyond the income and prices, for example, in cultural or social terms. In these cases, national-scale commercial decisions could comprise the local development of certain places and populations. So, even if trade is desirable when thinking about economic efficiency, it might not be the case when considering other realities and reasons. Even if some arguments are economically incorrect, they're still valid and reasonable from their own standpoint; that's not necessarily economic.

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