

Robust Comparative Statics with Misspecified Bayesian Learning

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Motivation

- We care about model misspecification in economic environments
 - Agents often work with misspecified models

 true model unknown, approx. with **incorrect** models

- A departure from the traditional rational expectations framework

 cognitive biases, complexity, simplified perspectives...

- Selective examples
 - Maximum likelihood estimation of misspecified linear models (White (1982, ECMA))
 - Monopolist learning with misspecified demand model (Nyarko (1991, JET))
 - Portfolio choice with misspecified asset returns (Uppal-Wang (2003, JF))
 - Interest rate/GDP forecasting with misspecified models (Farmer et al. (2024, JPE))

Motivation

- The Berk-Nash solution (Esponda and Pouzo (2016 (ECMA), 2021 (TE)))
 - Agent has **misspecified** models, takes action based on them, observes outcome, Bayesian updates on the models, and repeats...
 - The equilibrium/steady state characterization: optimal action/distribution and **best** incorrect model, both dependent on each other
 - Important because misspecification made explicit, allows for choice between different misspecified models to adjust for observed behavior
- Enriching economic environments with misspecified models
 - Captures limit outcomes of Bayesian learning when agents have misspecified models
 - One such environment of interest: Markov Decision Processes (MDPs)
- This paper: **Monotone comparative statics** with misspecified MDPs

Motivation

- For e.g.- the infinite-horizon expected discounted utility problem

$$\max_{\{x_t\}_{t=0}^{\infty}} \mathbb{E}_Q \left[\sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \delta^t u(s_t, x_t) \right], t = 0, 1, 2, \dots$$

- V is the solution to the Bellman equation in (1)

$$V(s) = \max_{x \in \mathbb{X}} \left\{ u(s, x) + \delta \int_{\mathbb{S}} V(s') Q(ds' | s, x) \right\} \quad (1)$$

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- Corresponding to (1), one can ask important comparative statics questions
 - \uparrow in $Q \stackrel{?}{\rightarrow} \uparrow$ in **optimal policy**; \uparrow in $Q \stackrel{?}{\rightarrow} \uparrow$ in **stationary distribution**
 - Results in the literature provide conditions, e.g. Hopenhayn-Prescott (1992)

“Stochastic Monotonicity and Stationary Distributions for Dynamic Economies (ECMA)”

- Instead misspecified models, $\{Q_\theta\}_{\theta \in \Theta}$, $Q \notin \{Q_\theta\}_{\theta \in \Theta}$, (Esponda-Pouzo (2021))

$$V(s, \mu) = \max_{x \in \mathbb{X}} \left\{ u(s, x) + \delta \int_{\mathbb{S}} V(s', \mu') \bar{Q}_\mu(ds' | s, x) \right\} \quad (2)$$

where $\bar{Q}_\mu = \int_{\Theta} Q_\theta \mu(d\theta)$ and μ' updated using Bayes' rule on models

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- Steady-state prediction: Berk-Nash solution (Esponda-Pouzo (2021), Berk (1966))
 - (a) stationary distribution over states and actions **dependent** on best-fit model
 - (b) best-fit model (KL divergence) **dependent** on stationary distribution
- **Monotone comparative statics of Berk-Nash solution w.r.t. primitives** $(u, \delta, Q, Q_{\Theta}, \Theta)$

MCS Results in Markov Environments

Environment	Change in Primitives	Sufficient Conditions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Markov Processes • Positive Shocks × 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • $Q \uparrow \implies \Theta_Q(m) \uparrow$ • $\Theta \uparrow \implies \Theta_Q(m) \uparrow$ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • $Q \uparrow: \log\left(\frac{Q_{\theta_2}}{Q_{\theta_1}}\right) \uparrow$ • Milgrom-Shannon (94)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Markov Decision Processes • Positive Shocks ✓ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patience ($\delta \uparrow$) • Utility primitives ($u \uparrow$) • Beliefs ($\mu \uparrow$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assumptions 1 and 2 • Inc. diff. in x and p • Assumptions 1 and 2

Table 1: MCS and Berk-Nash solution

Outline of the Paper

Results

- Theorem 1: Existence of such a Berk-Nash solution (a new proof based on monotonicity)
- Theorems 2-4: Robust MCS of Berk-Nash solution with primitives (identify a **positive** shock)
- Theorem 5: Bound on the cost of misspecification in terms of primitives (entropic bounds)

Technical Contribution

- Non-lattice fixed point techniques for endogenous MDPs with misspecification
 - Precursors: Smithson (1971), Acemoglu-Jensen (2015) (exogenous shocks with no misspecification in large economies)

Contribution to the literature

- Provide MCS for dynamic programming (MDPs) with misspecified learning and give robust predictions, without specific knowledge of primitives of the environment

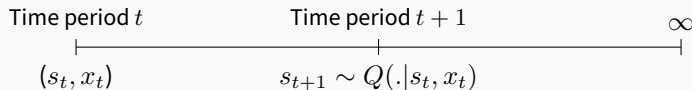
Plan of the Talk

- Framework
- Examples
- Theorems
- Extensions
- Conclusion

Model - Objective MDP

- Markov decision process (MDP) is a list $\langle \mathbb{S}, \mathbb{X}, u, Q, \delta \rangle$, where
 - (a) $\mathbb{S} \subseteq \mathbb{R}$ is a compact set of states, (b) $\mathbb{X} \subseteq \mathbb{R}$ is a compact set of actions,
 - (c) $u : \mathbb{S} \times \mathbb{X} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ is a per-period payoff function, (d) $Q : \mathbb{S} \times \mathbb{X} \rightarrow \mathcal{M}_1(\mathbb{S})$ is a transition probability function, (e) $\delta \in [0, 1)$ is the discount factor
- Choose feasible policy rule $\{x_t\}_{t=1}^{\infty}$ to maximize expected discounted utility

$$\mathbb{E}_Q \left[\sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \delta^t u(s_t, x_t) \right]$$



- The Bellman for this problem

$$V(s) = \max_{x \in \mathbb{X}} \left\{ u(s, x) + \delta \int_{\mathbb{S}} V(s') Q(ds' | s, x) \right\} \quad (3)$$

- Corresponding to (3), action \hat{x} is optimal given s in the MDP(Q) if

$$\hat{x} \in G(s) \equiv \arg \max_{x \in \mathbb{X}} \left\{ u(s, x) + \delta \int_{\mathbb{S}} V(s') Q(ds' | s, x) \right\} \quad (4)$$

Model - Subjective MDP

- Uni-dimensional compact parameterized **misspecified** models Θ

$$(\text{MDP}(Q), \mathcal{Q}_\Theta)$$

where $\mathcal{Q}_\Theta = \{Q_\theta : \theta \in \Theta \subseteq \mathbb{R}\}, Q \notin \mathcal{Q}_\Theta$

- The Kullback-Liebler (KL) divergence of a model Q_θ w.r.t. Q

$$\text{KL}(Q_\theta || Q) \equiv \mathbb{E}_Q[\ln(Q/Q_\theta)] \text{ (finite)} \quad (5)$$

where the **best-fit** set is

$$\Theta_Q \equiv \arg \min_{\theta \in \Theta} \text{KL}(Q_\theta || Q)$$

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- For infinite spaces, one uses the Radon-Nikodym derivative D_θ of Q with respect to Q_θ

Model - Berk-Nash Solution

Definition 1 (Esponda-Pouzo (2021)¹)

A probability distribution $m^* \in \Delta(\mathbb{S} \times \mathbb{X})$ is a Berk-Nash solution of the regular-SMDP if there exists a belief $\mu^* \in \Delta(\Theta)$ such that the following conditions hold.

- (i) Action x^* optimal given s in the MDP (\bar{Q}_{μ^*}) , $\bar{Q}_{\mu^*} = \int_{\Theta} Q_{\theta} \mu^*(d\theta)$, $\forall (s, x)$ in support of m^*
- (ii) Belief $\mu^* \in \Delta(\Theta_Q(m^*))$ where $\Theta_Q(m^*) \equiv \arg \min_{\theta \in \Theta} \int_{\mathbb{S} \times \mathbb{X}} \text{KL}(Q_{\theta} || Q) m^*(ds, dx)$
- (iii) Invariant measure on state, for all $A \subseteq \mathbb{S}$, $m_{\mathbb{S}}^*(A) = \int_{\mathbb{S} \times \mathbb{X}} Q(A | s, x) m^*(ds, dx)$

Regular SMDP: continuity (absolute), compact parameter space, U.I. Radon-Nikodym derivatives

¹Anderson-Duanmu-Ghosh-Khan (2024, JET), hereafter ADGK

Model - Behavior of Fixed Points

- Fixed points of the Berk-Nash solution mapping

$$T : Z \times P \rightarrow 2^Z$$

where $Z = \Delta(\mathbb{S} \times \mathbb{X}) \times \Delta(\Theta)$ and $P = \langle u, \delta, Q, Q_\Theta, \Theta \rangle$ are our primitives

The set of fixed points

$$\Lambda(p) \equiv \{z \in Z : z \in T(z, p)\}, p \in P$$

- Question:

change in primitives $\overset{?}{\rightarrow}$ change in Berk-Nash solution

Example I : Inference with No Role for Actions

Forecasting problem

- True process, $s_{t+1} \sim Q(\cdot|s_t)$, where

$$s_{t+1} = \rho s_t + \xi_{t+1}, \quad \xi_{t+1} \sim 0.5F_{(\mu_1, \sigma^2)} + 0.5F_{(\mu_2, \sigma^2)} \quad (6)$$

where F denotes the cumulative density function for a normal distribution. The components have different means ($\mu_1 \neq \mu_2$) but identical variances ($\sigma_1^2 = \sigma_2^2$).

- Agent has a set of models $\{Q_\theta\}$, indexed by $|\theta| \in [0, 1)$, $Q \notin \{Q_\theta\}$

$$s_{t+1} = \theta s_t + \epsilon_{t+1}, \quad \epsilon_{t+1} \sim N(0, \sigma^2)$$

Example I : Inference with No Role for Actions

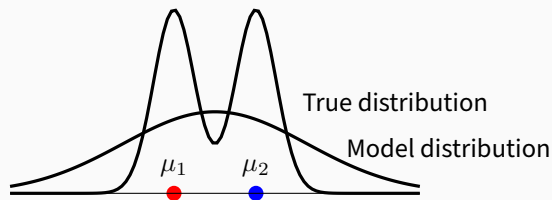


Figure 1: AR(1) models with misspecified Gaussian noise

- Best-fit inferred AR(1) parameter θ^* in the Berk-Nash equilibrium $m_{\mathbb{S}}^*$ has the following form,

$$\theta^* = \int_{\mathbb{S}} \hat{\theta}(s) m_{\mathbb{S}}^* = \rho + \int_{\mathbb{S}} \frac{(\mu_1 + \mu_2)}{s} m_{\mathbb{S}}^*$$

- A digression: notice when $\mu_1 + \mu_2 = 0$? The comparative statics of true persistence ρ and inferred persistence at the steady state θ^* is one-to-one

Example II: Inference and Actions Together - Misinference Channel

Savings with misperceived wealth process (based on Esponda-Pouzo (2021), ADGK)

- The agent learns about the return on their wealth process while optimally deciding consumption and savings
- Each period, the agent realizes wealth y_t , an i.i.d. preference shock z_t , and chooses savings $x_t \in [0, y_t] = \mathbb{X} \subseteq \mathbb{R}_+$
- State variables $s = (y, z)$ belong to $\mathbb{S} = \mathbb{R}_+ \times [0, 1]$
- Period t payoffs are $u(y_t, z_t, x_t) = z_t \ln(y_t - x_t)$, with discount factor δ
- **True process:**

$$\ln y_{t+1} = \alpha^* + \beta^* \ln x_t + \varepsilon_t,$$

where the unobserved productivity shock $\varepsilon_t = \gamma^* z_t + \xi_t$, with $\xi_t \sim \mathcal{N}(0, 1)$, $z_t \sim U[0, 1]$, and $\gamma^* > 0$ (correlated shocks)

Example II: Inference and Actions Together - Misinference Channel

- **Misspecified** process:

$$\ln y_{t+1} = \alpha + \beta \ln x_t + \varepsilon_t,$$

where $\varepsilon_t \sim \mathcal{N}(0, 1)$, ignoring the correlation between productivity and preference shocks.

Higher γ^* , **starker** the misspecification

- A key comparative static for the Berk-Nash solution: an increase in γ^* leads to:
 - m^* : The long-run **perceived** distribution of the wealth process (\downarrow)
 - $\hat{\beta}$: The best-fit parameter inferred for the return on the process (\downarrow)
- Misinference channel: A higher γ^* leads to a larger negative bias in the inferred return, driven by lower preference shocks and higher savings

Model - Orders on Primitives and Eqm. Objects

- Set Y dominates X in the strong-set order if for any x in X and y in Y , we have $\sup \{x, y\}$ in Y and $\inf \{x, y\}$ in X .
- Parameter space $\Theta \subseteq \mathbb{R}$ (strong-set order), utility and discount factor (natural order)
- $f : \mathbb{R}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$, is increasing if for $x \geq y$ in the component-wise order, $f(x) \geq f(y)$
- For all bounded, increasing, and measurable f 's,

$$m_2 \succsim_{st} m_1 \equiv \int_{\mathbb{S} \times \mathbb{X}} f(s, x) m_2(ds, dx) \geq \int_{\mathbb{S} \times \mathbb{X}} f(s, x) m_1(ds, dx)$$

- Poset (X, \succsim) is a lattice if for any $x, x' \in X$, the meet $x \wedge x'$ and the join $x \vee x'$ are in X
 - For e.g. $(\mathbb{R}, \succsim_{st})$ is a lattice. However, the poset $(\mathbb{S} \times \mathbb{X}, \succsim_{st})$ is not a lattice (Kamae, Krengel, O'Brien (1977))

Model - Assumptions

Assumption 1 (Standard)

$\mathbb{S}, \mathbb{X}, \Theta$ are lattices, $u(s, x)$ is supermodular in (s, x) , increasing in s .

Supemodularity: $u(s_1, x_1) + u(s_2, x_2) \leq u((s_1, x_1) \vee (s_2, x_2)) + u((s_1, x_1) \wedge (s_2, x_2))$

For an increasing $f : \mathbb{S} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$:

Assumption 2 (Models)

The following are true for all models θ in the family of models, $\mathcal{Q}_\Theta = \{Q_\theta : \theta \in \Theta\}$.

(i) Q_θ is stochastically increasing in (s, x) i.e. $\int_{\mathbb{S}} f(s') Q_\theta(ds' | s, x)$ is increasing in (s, x)

(ii) Q_θ is stochastically supermodular in (s, x) i.e. $\int_{\mathbb{S}} f(s') Q_\theta(ds' | s, x)$ is supermodular in (s, x)

Examples 1 and 2 satisfy such requirements, for e.g., AR (1) process. Further, Q is assumed to be monotone in (s, x) .

Model - Assumptions

Assumption 3 (Point Identification)

For any given $m \in \Delta(\mathbb{S} \times \mathbb{X})$, a SMDP (Q, Q_Θ) is point-identified, i.e.

$$\theta, \theta' \in \Theta(m; Q) \implies \theta = \theta'$$

Assumption 4 (Single Crossing)

$K_Q(\theta; m)$ satisfies the single crossing property in $(\theta; m)$, $\theta_1 \leq \theta_2, m_2 \succeq_{st} m_1$

$$K_Q(\theta_2; m_1) - K_Q(\theta_1; m_1) \geq 0 \implies K_Q(\theta_2; m_2) - K_Q(\theta_1; m_2) \geq 0.$$

$$\Theta_Q(m) \equiv \arg \min_{\theta \in \Theta} K_Q(m, \theta)$$

Invoke Milgrom-Shannon (1994): quasi-supermodularity trivially satisfied

Under standard (lattice and increasing payoffs), increasing and supermodular models, point identification : Assumptions 1-3

Theorem 1 (Existence and Compactness)

Under assumptions 1-3, every regular SMDP (Q, Q_Θ) with a bounded and continuous utility function has a Berk-Nash equilibrium and the set of such equilibria is compact.

A new existence proof:

- Esponda-Pouzo (2021): Only for finite spaces
- ADGK: Uses nonstandard analysis for infinite (compact and non-compact) spaces
- Theorem 1: A standard proof for compact spaces using ADGK and monotonicity assumptions

Main Result - Comparative Statics

Fix any belief μ over models, define the optimal policy correspondence G :

$$G(s, \mu, p) \equiv \arg \max_{x \in \mathbb{X}} \left\{ u(s, x) + \delta \int_{\mathbb{S}} V(s') \bar{Q}_{\mu}(ds' | s, x) \right\} \quad (7)$$

Positive Shock:

A Δ in a primitive from p_1 to p_2 is a positive shock (SSO) if:

For all $y_1 \in G(s, \mu, p_1)$ and $y_2 \in G(s, \mu, p_2)$, $y_1 \vee y_2 \in G(s, \mu, p_2)$ and $y_1 \wedge y_2 \in G(s, \mu, p_1)$

Fix $p \in P$. A Δ in the model distribution from μ_1 to μ_2 is a positive shock (SSO) if:

$G(s, \mu, p)$ is ascending in μ from μ_1 to μ_2

Main Result - Comparative Statics (via Positive Shock)

Under standard (lattice and increasing payoffs), increasing and supermodular models, point identification (assumptions 1-3), and single-crossing differences (assumption 4)

Theorem 2 (Main Result)

Suppose assumptions 1-4 hold. Then a positive shock to the primitives of the regular SMDP will lead to an increase in the least and the greatest equilibrium best-fit models. Further, a positive shock to the primitives will lead to

- (a) an increase in the least and greatest Berk-Nash equilibrium in the usual stochastic order dominance if changes in beliefs over models are positive shocks.
- (b) a decrease in the least and greatest Berk-Nash equilibrium in the usual stochastic order dominance if changes in beliefs over models are negative shocks.

Think of the unique Berk-Nash solution!

Identifying Positive Shocks in Misspecified Environments

Environment	Change in Primitives	Sufficient Conditions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Markov Processes • Positive Shocks \times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • $Q \uparrow \implies \Theta_Q(m) \uparrow$ • $\Theta \uparrow \implies \Theta_Q(m) \uparrow$ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • $Q \uparrow: \log\left(\frac{Q_{\theta_2}}{Q_{\theta_1}}\right) \uparrow$ • Milgrom-Shannon (94)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Markov Decision Processes • Positive Shocks \checkmark 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patience ($\delta \uparrow$) • Utility primitives ($u \uparrow$) • Beliefs ($\mu \uparrow$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assumptions 1 and 2 • Inc. diff. in x and p • Assumptions 1 and 2

Table 2: MCS and Berk-Nash solution

Theorem 3 (Increasing Models)

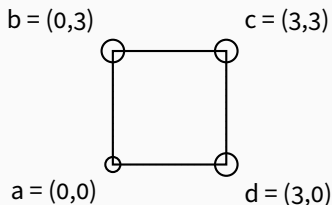
Suppose the hypothesis in Theorem 1 continue to hold. If a change in beliefs over models is a positive shock, then an increase in the parameter set under the strong set order leads to an increase in the least and the greatest equilibrium best-fit models.

Theorem 4 (Increasing and Convex Order)

Suppose assumptions 1-3 and single-crossing holds for increasing and convex order. Then a positive (negative) shock to the primitives will lead to an increase in the least and greatest Berk-Nash equilibrium in the increasing and convex order if changes in beliefs over models are positive (negative) shocks.

Technical Contribution

- Berk-Nash equilibrium map $T : W \rightarrow 2^W$, $W = \Delta(\mathbb{S} \times \mathbb{X}) \times \Delta(\Theta)$
- Space of probability measures ordered by \succsim_{st} not lattice - Tarski/Topkis/Knaster-Tarski/Hopenhayn-Prescott \times
- But it is chain-complete: a chain that has both infimum and supremum
 $p_1 = 0.5(\epsilon_a + \epsilon_b)$, $p_2 = 0.5(\epsilon_a + \epsilon_c)$, $p_3 = 0.5(\epsilon_c + \epsilon_b)$, $p_4 = 0.5(\epsilon_a + \epsilon_d)$.



- Apply non-lattice techniques that we tailor for endogenous MDPs with misspecification
 - Endogenous MDPs require stronger conditions of supermodularity on the Bellman

- Non-lattice structure of the Berk-Nash solution:
 - Endogenous misspecified MDPs require stronger conditions for uniqueness, including supermodularity of the Bellman function (assumptions 1 and 2).
- The proof technique follows a three-step structure:
 - Step 1: For Theorem 2, show stationary distributions m^* induced by G are Type I (Type II) monotonic in p for $\mu \in \Delta(\Theta)$
 - Step 2: Construct a mapping $\hat{\theta}$ that, for each μ and p , gives model distributions μ' . Fixed points are equilibrium distributions μ^*
 - Step 3: Show least and greatest selections of the map increase in p , also provides a new existence proof for Theorem 1 based on monotonicity and identification of T

Back to Example II - Analysis

An increase (decrease) in γ^* is a **negative** (positive) shock

- The state, action, and parameter spaces are lattices; utility is increasing in y and z . The concave payoff function with $\frac{d^2 u(y,z,x)}{dx dy} > 0$ is supermodular, satisfying Assumption 1
- Model distributions are Gaussian with mean $\alpha + \beta \ln x$ and unit variance, satisfying Assumption 2 via stochastic dominance of higher x
- Assumption 3 holds as Gaussian distributions are strictly log-concave, ensuring unique identification. Thus, Theorem 1 guarantees the Berk-Nash equilibrium
- Assumption 4 is verified via the sufficient condition

Concluding Remarks

- We establish new results on monotone comparative statics for misspecified dynamic programs and provide novel predictions for misspecified behavior
- The results are of applied interest across a variety of domains, including forecasting, consumption-saving models, and effort-choice problems ([In paper](#))
- The machinery to establish the results are powerful and relies on non-lattice characterizations
- Paper link: [Here!](#)

References

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- Ignacio Esponda and Demian Pouzo. Equilibrium in misspecified markov decision processes. Theoretical Economics, 16: 717-757, 2021.

Other Results - Welfare Ranking

- Objective welfare

$$W(s, \bar{\theta}) = \mathbb{E}_{Q(\cdot|s, g(s, \bar{\theta}))} \left[\sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \beta^t u(s_t, g(s_t, \bar{\theta})) \right], \quad t = 0, 1, 2, \dots \quad (8)$$

- $\bar{\theta} = \theta^*$ (correct), θ_* (misspecified)
- Approximation error in optimal policy

$$\|g(s, \theta^*) - g(s, \theta_*)\| < \gamma$$

- $u : \mathbb{S} \times \mathbb{X} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ is continuously differentiable in actions

Theorem 5

- $W(s, \theta^*) \geq W(s, \theta_*)$
- For a given approximation error γ ,

$$\|W(s, \theta^*) - W(s, \theta_*)\| \leq \frac{2\beta m_0(1 - e^{-k^*}) + m_1\gamma}{1 - \beta}, \quad (9)$$

where m_0 and m_1 denote the absolute upper bound on the utility and the marginal utility function, respectively, and k^* is the supremum on the KL entropy between Q with the optimal policy and the Q with the misspecified policy

Inspired by Santos (2000), Theorem 5 is potentially useful in the numerical approximation of the Berk-Nash equilibria.

Related Literature

Learning with Misspecified models

Berk (1966), Arrow-Green (1973), Nyarko (1991), Hansen-Sargent (1999, 2001), Esponda-Pouzo (2016, 2021), Heidheus-Koszegi-Strack (2018), Esponda-Pouzo-Yamamoto (2021), Molavi (2022), Frick-Iijima-Ishii (2022), Farmer-Nakamura-Steinsson (2024), Lanzani (2024), Anderson-Duanmu-Ghosh-Khan (2024)

Monotone Comparative statics

Smithson (1971), Höft (1987), Amir (1991), Hopenhayn-Prescott (1992), Milgrom-Shannon (1994), Topkis (1998), Huggett (2003), Torres (2005), Acemoglu-Jensen (2013, 2015), Light (2021), Balbus-Dziewulski-Reffett-Wozny (2022), Dziewulski-Quah (2023)

Miscellaneous

Santos (2000), Koulovatianos-Mirman-Santugini (2009)