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Machine Learning a Ramsey Plan*

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Abstract

We use a Python program to calculate a pair $(\vec{\theta}, \vec{\mu})$ of infinite sequences of money creation and price level inflation rates that maximize a benevolent time 0 government's quadratic objective function for a linear-quadratic version of Calvo (1978). The program computes an open-loop representation of the optimal plan and an associated monotonically declining, bounded from below sequence of continuation values whose limit is a worst continuation value that is associated with a "timeless perspective". We run some least squares regressions on fake data to try to learn about the structure of the optimal plan but are stymied by not knowing which variables should be on the right and left sides of our regressions. We use literary arguments to decide this question, but they are inconclusive.

Key words: Artificial intelligence, machine learning, fake data, Ramsey plan, time inconsistency, open loop, closed loop, inflation, money supply, "fake data".

Introduction

Many applications of machine learning deploy an algorithm to compute a nonlinear function $f : X \to Y$ that satisfies context-specific auxiliary conditions. Popular contexts include the following:

1. $\{x_i, y_i\}_{i=1}^I \in X^I \bigtimes Y^I$ is a data set, and f is a nonlinear least squares regression function.
2. The function f maximizes some functional or solves some functional equation.

This paper provides an instance of the second context, a classic optimum problem that seeks a time series of money growth rates $\{\mu_t\}_{t=0}^\infty$ that maximizes a government's objective function at time 0. The optimizer takes the form of a function f that maps times $t \in X = \{0, 1, 2, \ldots\}$ into $\mathbb{R}$. Let:

- p_t be the log of the price level,

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- m_t be the log of nominal money balances,
- $\theta_t = p_{t+1} - p_t$ be the net rate of inflation between t and $t+1$,
- $\mu_t = m_{t+1} - m_t$ be the net rate of growth of nominal balances.

The government's problem is cast in terms of these components:

- $\vec{\mu} = \{\mu_t\}_{t=0}^{\infty}$ is a time series of money growth rates,
- $\mu^t = \{\mu_{t+s}\}_{s=0}^{\infty}$ is a time t **future** or **tail** of a sequence of money growth rates,
- $\vec{\theta} = \{\theta_t\}_{t=0}^{\infty}$ is a sequence of inflation rates in the price level,
- a function g that maps the future μ^t of $\vec{\mu}$ at t into the inflation rate at t, so that $\theta_t = g(\mu^t)$,
- a social welfare criterion

$$v_0 = \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \beta^t r(\mu^t), \tag{1}$$

  where $r(\mu^t) = s(g(\mu^t), \mu_t), g$, and $s(\cdot, \cdot)$ are known functions and $\beta \in (0, 1)$.

The function g describes the behavior of private agents and markets that determines the inflation rate π_t at t as a function of future money growth rates μ^t from time t forward. The government knows the functions g and r and wants an **open loop** plan $\mu_t = f(t)$ – that is, a function of time that describes a sequence of money growth rates that maximizes the welfare criterion v_0 defined in (1). Our source of functions s and g is the classic paper by Calvo (1978).

The presence of the function g in the government's objective function tells it to take into account effects that μ_s for all $s \geq 0$ have on θ_0 when it chooses a time series $\vec{\mu}$. A government at time 1 instead sought to choose a sequence $\vec{\mu}$ to maximize the alternative welfare criterion

$$v_1 = \sum_{t=1}^{\infty} \beta^{t-1} r(\mu^t) \tag{2}$$

would not care about μ_0 or θ_0. Consequently, it would choose a $\vec{\mu}$ time series different from the maximizer of criterion (1), so the plan that optimizes criterion (1) is **time inconsistent**.

We deploy two machine learning approaches. The first is quite lazy: it writes an algorithm that computes the government planner's objective as a function of a money growth rate sequence and hands it over to a **gradient ascent** optimizer. The appendix describes a less lazy approach that expresses the planner's objective as an affine quadratic form in $\vec{\mu}$, computes first-order conditions for an optimum, arranges them into a system of simultaneous linear equations for $\vec{\mu}$ and then $\vec{\theta}$, and solves them. The second approach uses less computer time to calculate the Ramsey plan.

The Model

Calvo's model focuses on intertemporal trade-offs between

- utility accruing from a representative agent's anticipations of future deflation that lower the agent's cost of holding real money balances and thereby induce the agent to increase his stock of real money balances, and

- social costs associated with the distorting taxes that a government levies to acquire the paper money that it withdraws from circulation in order to generate prospective deflation.

The model features

- rational expectations,
- costly government actions at all dates $t \geq 1$, which increase the representative agent's utilities at dates before t.

The model combines a demand function for real balances formulated by Cagan (1956) with the perfect foresight assumed by Sargent and Wallace (1973) and Calvo (1978).[1]

Components

There is no uncertainty. A representative agent's demand for real balances is governed by a perfect foresight version of a Cagan (1956) demand function:

$$m_t - p_t = -\alpha(p_{t+1} - p_t), \quad \alpha > 0, \tag{3}$$

for all $t \geq 0$.

Equation (3) asserts that the demand for real balances is inversely related to the representative agent's expected rate of inflation. Because there is no uncertainty, the expected rate of inflation equals the actual rate of inflation.[2]

Subtracting equation (3) at time t from the same equation at time $t+1$ gives

$$\mu_t - \theta_t = -\alpha\theta_{t+1} + \alpha\theta_t,$$

or

$$\theta_t = \frac{\alpha}{1+\alpha}\theta_{t+1} + \frac{1}{1+\alpha}\mu_t. \tag{4}$$

Because $\alpha > 0$, $0 < \frac{\alpha}{1+\alpha} < 1$, so difference equation (4) in the θ sequence with sequence $\vec{\mu}$ as the "forcing sequence" is stable when "solved forward." For scalar b_t, let L^2 be the space of sequences $\{b_t\}_{t=0}^{\infty}$ that satisfy

$$\sum_{t=0}^{\infty} b_t^2 < +\infty.$$

We say that a sequence that belongs to L^2 is **square summable**.

When we assume that $\vec{\mu} = \{\mu_t\}_{t=0}^{\infty}$ is square summable and also require that $\vec{\theta} = \{\theta_t\}_{t=0}^{\infty}$ is square summable, the linear difference equation (4) can be solved forward to get

$$\theta_t = \frac{1}{1+\alpha}\sum_{j=0}^{\infty}\left(\frac{\alpha}{1+\alpha}\right)^j \mu_{t+j}, \quad t \geq 0. \tag{5}$$

The government values a representative household's utility of real balances at time t according to the utility function

$$U(m_t - p_t) = u_0 + u_1(m_t - p_t) - \frac{u_2}{2}(m_t - p_t)^2, \quad u_0 > 0,\ u_1 > 0,\ u_2 > 0. \tag{6}$$

The money demand function (3) and the utility function (6) imply that[3]

$$U(-\alpha\theta_t) = u_0 + u_1(-\alpha\theta_t) - \frac{u_2}{2}(-\alpha\theta_t)^2. \tag{7}$$

Via equation (5), a government plan $\vec{\mu} = \{\mu_t\}_{t=0}^{\infty}$ implies a sequence of inflation rates $\vec{\theta} = \{\theta_t\}_{t=0}^{\infty}$.

The government incurs social costs $\frac{c}{2}\mu_t^2$ when it changes the stock of nominal money balances at rate μ_t at time t. Therefore, the one-period welfare function of a benevolent government is

$$s(\theta_t, \mu_t) = U(-\alpha\theta_t) - \frac{c}{2}\mu_t^2.$$

We say that the government is a Ramsey planner. It wants to maximize

$$V = \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \beta^t s(\theta_t, \mu_t), \tag{8}$$

where $\beta \in (0, 1)$ is a discount factor. It chooses a vector of money growth rates $\vec{\mu}$ to maximize criterion (8), subject to equation (5) and the restriction:

$$\vec{\theta} \in L^2. \tag{9}$$

Equations (5) and (9) imply that $\vec{\theta}$ is a function of $\vec{\mu}$. In particular, the inflation rate θ_t satisfies

$$\theta_t = (1 - \lambda) \sum_{j=0}^{\infty} \lambda^j \mu_{t+j}, \quad t \geq 0, \tag{10}$$

where

$$\lambda = \frac{\alpha}{1 + \alpha}.$$

Basic Objects

Let's remind ourselves of the mathematical objects in play.

We have a pair of sequences of inflation rates and money growth, rates

$$(\vec{\theta}, \vec{\mu}) = \{\theta_t, \mu_t\}_{t=0}^{\infty},$$

and a planner's value function,

$$V = \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \beta^t \left(h_0 + h_1\theta_t + h_2\theta_t^2 - \frac{c}{2}\mu_t^2 \right). \tag{11}$$

In (11), we set h_0, h_1, h_2 to match

$$u_0 + u_1(-\alpha\theta_t) - \frac{u_2}{2}(-\alpha\theta_t)^2$$

with

$$h_0 + h_1\theta_t + h_2\theta_t^2.$$

To make our parameters match as desired, we set

$$\begin{aligned} h_0 &= u_0, \\ h_1 &= -\alpha u_1, \\ h_2 &= -\frac{u_2\alpha^2}{2}. \end{aligned} \tag{12}$$

A Ramsey planner chooses $\vec{\mu}$ to maximize the government's value function (11), subject to equation (10). A $\vec{\mu}$ that solves this problem is called a **Ramsey plan**.

Timing Protocol

Calvo (1978) asks the government to choose the money growth sequence $\vec{\mu}$ once and for all, at or before time 0. By choosing the money growth sequence $\vec{\mu}$, the government indirectly chooses the inflation sequence $\vec{\theta}$. So, the government effectively chooses a bivariate *time series* $(\vec{\mu}, \vec{\theta})$. The government's problem is *static* in the sense that it chooses all components of a bivariate time series $(\vec{\mu}, \vec{\theta})$ at or before time 0.

Approximation and Truncation Parameter

It turns out that the sequences $\vec{\theta}$ and $\vec{\mu}$ converge to stationary values under a Ramsey plan. Consequently, we impose the guess that

$$\lim_{t\to+\infty} \mu_t = \bar{\mu}.$$

Convergence of μ_t to $\bar{\mu}$, together with (10), the formula for the inflation rate, then implies that

$$\lim_{t\to+\infty} \theta_t = \bar{\theta}.$$

We will guess a time T large enough that μ_t has gotten very close to the limit $\bar{\mu}$. Then, we will approximate $\vec{\mu}$ by a truncated vector with the property

$$\mu_t = \bar{\mu} \quad \forall t \geq T.$$

Similarly, we will approximate $\vec{\theta}$ with a truncated vector with the property

$$\theta_t = \bar{\theta} \quad \forall t \geq T.$$

In light of our approximation that $\mu_t = \bar{\mu}$ for all $t \geq T$, we seek a function that takes

$$\tilde{\mu} = \begin{bmatrix} \mu_0 & \mu_1 & \cdots & \mu_{T-1} & \bar{\mu} \end{bmatrix}$$

as an input and gives as an output the vector

$$\tilde{\theta} = \begin{bmatrix} \theta_0 & \theta_1 & \cdots & \theta_{T-1} & \bar{\theta} \end{bmatrix},$$

where $\bar{\theta} = \bar{\mu}$ and θ_t satisfies

$$\theta_t = (1-\lambda) \sum_{j=0}^{T-1-t} \lambda^j \mu_{t+j} + \lambda^{T-t} \bar{\mu}, \tag{13}$$

for $t = 0, 1, \ldots, T-1$.

Having defined the vector $\tilde{\mu}$ and computed the vector $\tilde{\theta}$ using formula (13), we can rewrite the government's value function (11) as

$$\tilde{V} = \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \beta^t \left(h_0 + h_1 \theta_t + h_2 \theta_t^2 - \frac{c}{2} \mu_t^2 \right), \tag{14}$$

or, more precisely, as

$$\tilde{V} = \sum_{t=0}^{T-1} \beta^t \left(h_0 + h_1 \theta_t + h_2 \theta_t^2 - \frac{c}{2} \mu_t^2 \right) + \frac{\beta^T}{1-\beta} \left(h_0 + h_1 \bar{\mu} + h_2 \bar{\mu}^2 - \frac{c}{2} \bar{\mu}^2 \right), \tag{15}$$

where θ_t for $t = 0, 1, \ldots, T-1$ satisfies formula (13).

Gradient Ascent Algorithm

We now describe an algorithm that maximizes the criterion function (11), subject to equation (10), by choice of the truncated vector $\tilde{\mu}$. On the basis of the discussion in the section above, we compute the gradient of the objective function (15) with respect to $\tilde{\mu}$. We can compute it using the following simple algorithm. In the algorithm, we set $\tilde{V}$ be a function of $\tilde{\mu}$ to indicate that we are computing the gradient of $\tilde{V}$ with respect to $\tilde{\mu}$.

Algorithm 1: Compute $\tilde{V}(\tilde{\mu})$ (`Compute_V`)

Require: Parameters $\tilde{\mu}$, $\beta = 0.85$, $c = 2$, $\alpha = 1$, $u_0 = 1$, $u_1 = 0.5$, $u_2 = 3$, $T = 40$

1: Compute $\tilde{\theta}$ using (13)
2: Compute coefficients h_0, h_1, h_2 using (12)
3: Compute $\tilde{V}$ using

$$\tilde{V}(\tilde{\mu}) = \sum_{t=0}^{T-1} \beta^t \left(h_0 + h_1 \tilde{\theta}_t + h_2 \tilde{\theta}_t^2 - \frac{c}{2} \tilde{\mu}_t^2 \right) + \frac{\beta^T}{1-\beta} \left(h_0 + h_1 \bar{\mu} + h_2 \bar{\mu}^2 - \frac{c}{2} \bar{\mu}^2 \right),$$

4: **return** $\tilde{V}$

We use a Python function `Compute_V` to compute a value $\tilde{V}$ associated with given a vector $\tilde{\mu}$.[4] Our algorithm for maximizing the value function $\tilde{V}$ with respect to $\tilde{\mu}$ employs autodifferentiation in `JAX` (Bradbury et al. 2018) and the Adam optimizer (`AdamOptimizer`) (Kingma 2014) from `optax` (DeepMind et al. 2020). Autodifferentiation computes the gradient directly from the function `Compute_V`. The `optax` and machine learning libraries typically implement gradient descent, so in Algorithm 2, we reformulate our maximization problem as an equivalent minimization of $-\tilde{V}$ with respect to $\tilde{\mu}$.

Algorithm 2: Optimization Algorithm for Computing $\tilde{V}$

Require:
Functions: `Compute_V`, `AdamOptimizer`
Parameters: $\eta = 0.1$ (learning rate)
$\varepsilon = 10^{-7}$ (convergence tolerance)
$N = 10,000$ (max number of iterations)

Step 1: Initialization

Set initial guess $\tilde{\mu}_0 \leftarrow \vec{0}$
Compute gradient function $\nabla_{\tilde{\mu}} V = \left[\frac{\partial \tilde{V}}{\partial \mu_1}, \frac{\partial \tilde{V}}{\partial \mu_2}, \ldots, \frac{\partial \tilde{V}}{\partial \mu_T}\right]$ using automatic differentiation `jax.grad`.

Step 2: Optimization

Initialize `AdamOptimizer` with learning rate η, and exponential decay rates.
Set iteration counter $i \leftarrow 0$
repeat
  Compute gradients: $g_i \leftarrow -\nabla_{\tilde{\mu}} V(\tilde{\mu}_i)$ *# For maximization*
  Update parameters: $\tilde{\mu}_{i+1} \leftarrow$ `AdamOptimizer`$(\tilde{\mu}_i, g_i)$
  if $\|g_i\| < \varepsilon$ **then**
    Convergence achieved: $\tilde{\mu}^* \leftarrow \tilde{\mu}_i$
    break
  end if
  $i \leftarrow i + 1$
until $i \geq N$
$V^* \leftarrow$ `Compute_V`$(\tilde{\mu}^*)$
return $\tilde{\mu}^*, \tilde{V}^*$

We initiate the gradient ascent algorithm with a money growth sequence $\mu_t = 0$ for all $t \geq 0$, then iteratively update $\tilde{\mu}$ until convergence. Figure 1 plots the Ramsey plan's μ_t and θ_t for $t = 0, \ldots, T$ against t computed by the algorithm. Note that while θ_t is less than μ_t for low t's, it eventually converges to a limit $\bar{\mu}$ of μ_t as $t \to +\infty$, a consequence of how formula (5) makes θ_t a weighted average of future μ_t's.

Continuation Values

It is useful to compute a sequence $\{v_t\}_{t=0}^T$ of "continuation values,"

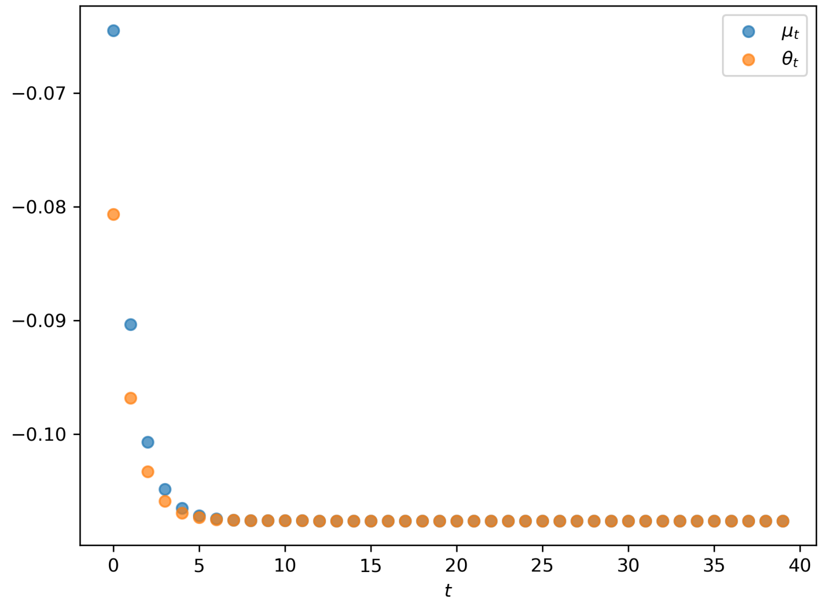

Figure 1
Ramsey plan ($\vec{\mu}$ **and** $\vec{\theta}$)

$$v_t = \sum_{s=t}^{\infty} \beta^{s-t} s(\theta_{t+s}, \mu_{t+s}),$$

along a Ramsey plan. To do so, we will start at our truncation date T and compute

$$v_T = \frac{1}{1-\beta} s(\bar{\mu}, \bar{\mu}).$$

Then, starting from $t = T - 1$, we will iterate backwards on the recursion

$$v_t = s(\theta_t, \mu_t) + \beta v_{t+1}$$

for $t = T - 1, T - 2, \ldots, 0$.

The initial continuation value v_0 should equal the optimized value of the Ramsey planner's criterion V, defined in equation (8). We verify approximate equality by inspecting Figure 2, which plots v_t against t for $t = 0, \ldots, T$.

Before studying Figure 2 in detail, we take a brief detour. Recall that our Ramsey planner chooses $\vec{\mu}$ to maximize the government's value function (11), subject to equation (10). It is useful to consider a distinct problem in which a planner again chooses $\vec{\mu}$ to maximize the government's value function (11), but now subject to equation (10) and the additional restriction that $\mu_t = \bar{\mu}$ for all t. The solution of this problem is a time-invariant $\mu_t = \mu^{CR}$ for all $t \geq 0$. Computing μ^{CR} with a gradient ascent algorithm is easy. Now, turn to Figure 2 and observe that (a) the sequence of continuation values $\{v_t\}_{t=0}^{T}$ is monotonically decreasing; (b)

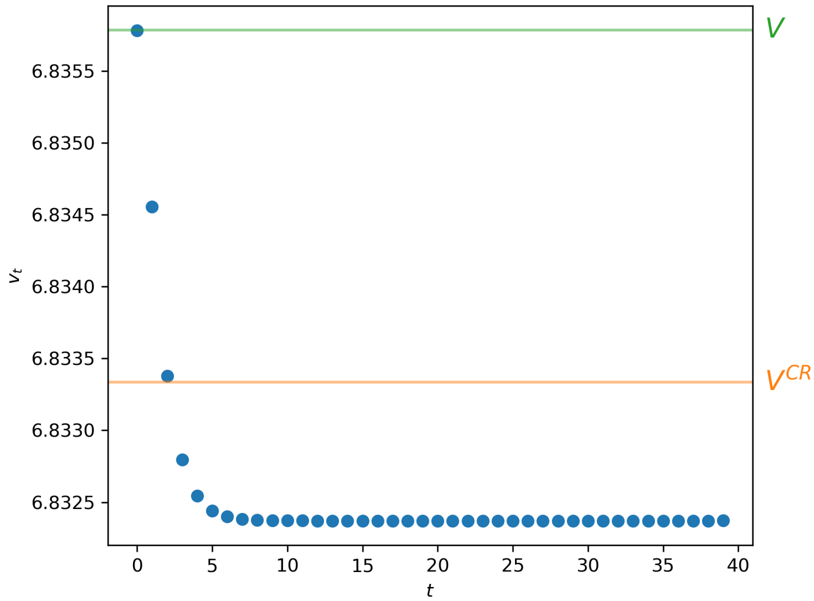

Figure 2
Continuation values

$v_0 > V^{CR} > v_T$ so that (c) the value v_0 of the ordinary Ramsey plan exceeds the value V^{CR} of the special Ramsey plan in which the planner is constrained to set $\mu_t = \mu^{CR}$ for all t; (d) the continuation value v_T of the ordinary Ramsey plan for $t \geq T$ is constant and is less than the value V^{CR} of the special Ramsey plan in which the planner is constrained to set $\mu_t = \mu^{CR}$ for all t; (e) the worst continuation value v_T is what some macroeconomists call the "value of a Ramsey plan under a timeless perspective." (We will have more to say about this concept soon.)

Applying Human Intelligence

So far, we have represented a Ramsey plan in the **open loop** form of a function

$$\mu_t = f(t) \tag{16}$$

that maps $t \in \{0, 1, 2, \ldots, \}$ to $\mu_t \in \mathbb{R}$.

As indicated in Figure 1, the Ramsey planner makes $\vec{\mu}$ and $\vec{\theta}$ vary over time:

- Both $\vec{\theta}$ and $\vec{\mu}$ decline monotonically.
- $\vec{\theta}$ and $\vec{\mu}$ converge from above to a common constant $\bar{\mu}$.

The **open loop** representation of a Ramsey plan respects the Ramsey problem's instruction to choose a *sequence* $\vec{\mu}$ once and for all at time 0. Nevertheless, many macroeconomists and control theorists prefer a **closed loop** representation of a Ramsey plan that takes the form of a pair of functions:

$$\mu_t = m(z_t),$$
$$z_{t+1} = n(z_t),$$

where z_t is a **state vector**, the second equation is a transition equation for z_{t+1}, and z_0^R is a value that the Ramsey planner chooses for the initial state vector.

Such a recursive structure in the $\vec{\mu}, \vec{\theta}$ chosen by our machine-learning Ramsey planner lies hidden from view. Let's try to bring it out by again using machine learning. We will proceed by viewing the Ramsey pair $\vec{\mu}^R, \vec{\theta}^R$ as "fake data" on which we will run some exploratory least squares regressions.[5] In what follows, we use $\vec{\mu}^R, \vec{\theta}^R$ to denote the "fake data."

We add some human intelligence to the artificial intelligence embodied in our least squares Python programs by formulating specifications of regressions to run on our "fake data." We begin by computing least squares linear regressions of some components of $\vec{\theta}^R$ and $\vec{\mu}^R$ on other components and hoping that these regressions will reveal a structure hidden within the $\vec{\mu}^R, \vec{\theta}^R$ sequences associated with a Ramsey plan.

It is worth pausing to think about roles being played here by human and artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence takes the form of a computer program runs the regressions. But one is always free to regress anything on anything else. Human intelligence, such as it is, must tell us which regressions to run. Additional inputs of human intelligence will be required fully to appreciate what those regressions reveal about the structure of a Ramsey plan.

Our machine-learned Ramsey plan $\vec{\mu}^R, \vec{\theta}^R$ constitutes the "fake" data set that we use to run regressions in Table 1 and Table 2. Table 1 reports several regressions with μ_t on the right side. Table 2 reports several regressions with θ_t on the right side. We begin by focusing on the first entry in Table 1, which reports outcomes from regressing θ_t on a constant and μ_t. This seems natural because equation (5) asserts that inflation at time t is determined by the money growth sequence $\{\mu_s\}_{s=t}^{\infty}$. After all, since a Ramsey planner chooses a money growth sequence, shouldn't money growth be the "exogenous variable" in our regressions? We will return to this question soon.

The first entry of Table 1 reports the least squares affine regression $\theta_t = \tilde{b}_0 + \tilde{b}_1\mu_t + \varepsilon_t$, where ε_t is a least squares residual that is by construction orthogonal to μ_t.

Notice that the R^2 statistic is 1, so the error term is nearly zero and we have discovered that

$$\theta_t = -.0403 + .6252\mu_t.$$

We plot the regression line in the left panel of Figure 3. The dots indicate μ_t, θ_t pairs for $t = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$ that converge from above to a limiting pair $\underline{\mu}, \underline{\theta}$.

In hopes of discovering a law of motion of $\vec{\mu}$ under the Ramsey plan, the second entry of Table 1 reports the least squares affine regression $\mu_{t+1} = \tilde{d}_0 + \tilde{d}_1\mu_t + \varepsilon_t$. Here, we recycle notation, and ε_t is again a least squares residual that is by construction orthogonal to μ_t.

We again get a perfect fit and have now discovered the following Ramsey planner's law of motion for $\vec{\mu}^R$:

$$\mu_{t+1} = -.0645 + .4005\mu_t.$$

We plot the regression line in the middle panel of Figure 3. Here the dots indicate μ_t, μ_{t+1}

Table 1
Regression results with μ_t as independent variable

Model	Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-statistic
$\theta_t = \tilde{b}_0 + \tilde{b}_1 \mu_t + \varepsilon_t$	Constant ($\tilde{b}_0$)	-0.0403	1.59×10^{-8}	-2.53×10^{6}
	μ_t ($\tilde{b}_1$)	0.6252	1.5×10^{-7}	4.16×10^{6}
	$R^2 = 1.000$			
$\mu_{t+1} = \tilde{d}_0 + \tilde{d}_1 \mu_t + \varepsilon_t$	Constant ($\tilde{d}_0$)	-0.0645	3.61×10^{-8}	-1.79×10^{6}
	μ_t ($\tilde{d}_1$)	0.4005	3.4×10^{-7}	1.18×10^{6}
	$R^2 = 1.000$			
$v_t = \tilde{g}_0 + \tilde{g}_1 \mu_t + \varepsilon_t$	Constant ($\tilde{g}_0$)	6.8417	0.000	2.09×10^{4}
	μ_t ($\tilde{g}_1$)	0.0864	0.003	27.927
	$R^2 = 0.954$			
$v_t = \tilde{g}_0 + \tilde{g}_1 \mu_t + \tilde{g}_2 \mu_t^2 + \varepsilon_t$	Constant ($\tilde{g}_0$)	6.8281	1.92×10^{-6}	3.55×10^{6}
	μ_t ($\tilde{g}_1$)	-0.2370	4.55×10^{-5}	-5213.119
	μ_t^2 ($\tilde{g}_2$)	-1.8369	0.000	-7125.667
	$R^2 = 1.000$			

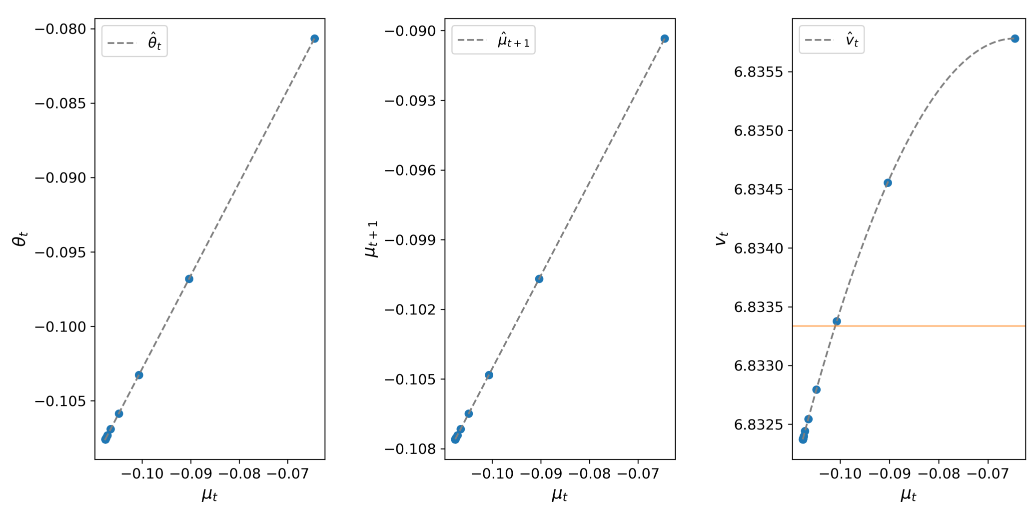

Figure 3
Regression of θ_t on a constant and μ_t (left), regression of μ_{t+1} on a constant and μ_t (center), and regression of v_t on a constant, μ_t, and μ_t^2. The orange line denotes the value of V^{CR} (right).

pairs for $t = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$, which converge from above to a limiting pair $\underline{\mu}, \underline{\mu}$.

The third entry of Table 1 reports the least squares affine regression $v_t = \tilde{g}_0 + \tilde{g}_1 \mu_t + \varepsilon_t$, where ε_t is again a least squares residual that is by construction orthogonal to μ_t.

The R^2 indicates the affine regression line explains only 95.4% of the variation in v_t. Since the R^2 is less than 1, the nonzero least squares residual ε_t that is orthogonal to μ_t remains in the equation.

We find this result displeasing because neither the government nor the representative agent faces any uncertainty and μ_t seems to be the only thing that can affect v_t. In hopes of reducing the error terms, the fourth entry of Table 1 reports a least squares regression of v_t on a constant, μ_t, and μ_t^2.

Now, the R^2 is 1, so ε_t disappears, and we have succeeded in unearthing the following representation of the time t continuation valuation v_t as a function of the time t money growth rate μ_t:

$$v_t = 6.8281 - .2370\mu_t - 1.8369\mu_t^2.$$

The regression line is plotted in the right panel of Figure 3.

Assembling our regressions, we discover that along a single Ramsey outcome path $\vec{\mu}^R, \vec{\theta}^R$, the following relationships prevail:

$$\begin{aligned} \mu_0 &= \mu_0^R, \\ \theta_t &= \tilde{b}_0 + \tilde{b}_1 \mu_t, \\ \mu_{t+1} &= \tilde{d}_0 + \tilde{d}_1 \mu_t, \end{aligned} \tag{17}$$

where $\tilde{b}_0, \tilde{b}_1, \tilde{d}_0, \tilde{d}_1$ are parameters whose values we estimated with our regressions; we unearthed initial value μ_0^R, along with other components of $\vec{\mu}^R, \vec{\theta}^R$, when we computed the Ramsey plan.

In addition, we learned that along our Ramsey plan, continuation values are described by the quadratic function

$$v_t = \tilde{g}_0 + \tilde{g}_1 \mu_t + \tilde{g}_2 \mu_t^2.$$

Direction of Fit?

Instead of taking μ_t as the "independent" (i.e., right side) variable, let's temporarily put θ_t on the right side. A plausible case for putting θ_t and not μ_t on the right side could be that the Ramsey planner is "inflation targeting", just as many governments today tell their central banks to do. The three rows of Table 2 report results.

Taking stock, we see that our regression with θ_t on the right side tells us that along the Ramsey outcome $\vec{\mu}^R, \vec{\theta}^R$, the affine function

$$\mu_t = .0645 + 1.5995\theta_t$$

fits perfectly, and so do the regression lines

$$\theta_{t+1} = -.0645 + .4005\theta_t,$$

$$v_t = 6.8052 - .7580\theta_t - 4.6991\theta_t^2.$$

Table 2
Regression results with θ_t as independent variable

Model	Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-statistic
$\mu_t = b_0 + b_1\theta_t + \varepsilon_t$	Constant (b_0)	0.0645	4.42×10^{-8}	1.46×10^{6}
	θ_t (b_1)	1.5995	4.14×10^{-7}	3.86×10^{6}
	$R^2 = 1.000$			
$\theta_{t+1} = d_0 + d_1\theta_t + \varepsilon_t$	Constant (d_0)	-0.0645	4.84×10^{-8}	-1.33×10^{6}
	θ_t (d_1)	0.4005	4.54×10^{-7}	8.82×10^{5}
	$R^2 = 1.000$			
$v_t = g_0 + g_1\theta_t + g_2\theta_t^2 + \varepsilon_t$	Constant (g_0)	6.8052	5.91×10^{-6}	1.15×10^{6}
	θ_t (g_1)	-0.7581	0.000	-6028.976
	θ_t^2 (g_2)	-4.6996	0.001	-7131.888
	$R^2 = 1.000$			

Thus, we have discovered that along a single Ramsey outcome path $\vec{\mu}^R, \vec{\theta}^R$, the following relationships prevail:

$$\begin{aligned} \theta_0 &= \theta_0^R, \\ \mu_t &= b_0 + b_1\theta_t, \\ \theta_{t+1} &= d_0 + d_1\theta_t, \end{aligned} \tag{18}$$

where b_0, b_1, d_0, d_1 are parameters whose values we estimated with our regressions; we unearthed initial value θ_0^R, along with other components of $\vec{\mu}^R, \vec{\theta}^R$, when we computed the Ramsey plan.

In addition, we learned that along our Ramsey plan, continuation values are described by the quadratic function

$$v_t = g_0 + g_1\theta_t + g_2\theta_t^2.$$

As with our earlier regressions with μ_t on the right side, we discovered these relationships by running some regressions, staring at the results, and noticing that the R^2 tells us that the fits are perfect.

The right panel of Figure 4 indicates that the highest continuation value v_0 at $t = 0$ appears at the peak of the quadratic function $g_0 + g_1\theta_t + g_2\theta_t^2$. Subsequent values of v_t for $t \geq 1$ appear to the lower left of the pair (θ_0, v_0) and converge monotonically from above to v_T at time T.

The value V^{CR} attained by the Ramsey plan, which is restricted to be a constant $\mu_t = \mu^{CR}$ sequence, appears as a horizontal line. Evidently, continuation values $v_t > V^{CR}$ for $t = 0, 1, 2$ while $v_t < V^{CR}$ for $t \geq 3$.

It is reasonable to suppose that qualitatively similar relationships would hold along the Ramsey plans that our machine learning algorithms would find for other sets of parameter values $\beta, \alpha, c, u_0, u_1, u_2$, but that the parameters of the regression functions would change. These least squares regression coefficients are themselves complicated nonlinear functions of the parameters $\beta, \alpha, c, u_0, u_1, u_2$, which shape the government's criterion function, but we could still expect to find that $R^2 = 1$ for the corresponding regressions.

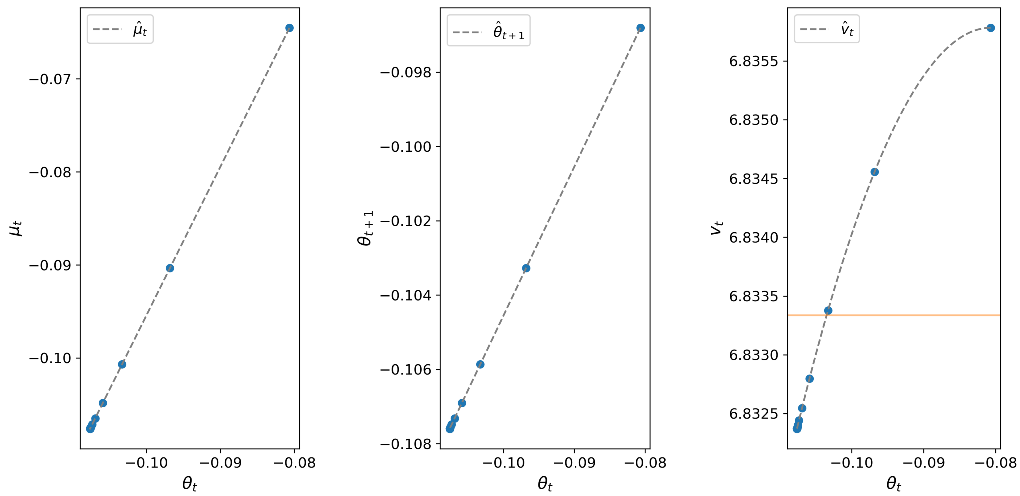

Figure 4
Regression of μ_t on a constant and θ_t (left), regression of θ_{t+1} on a constant and θ_t (center), and regression of v_t on a constant and θ_t and θ_t^2. The orange line depicts V^{CR} (right).

What Machine Learning Taught Us

We have discovered that the Ramsey plan for $\vec{\mu}$ seems to have a recursive structure. But it is challenging to say more using the methods and ideas we deployed here. We have discovered *two* closed-loop representations of a Ramsey plan and the associated continuation value sequence, one with μ_t as the right side "independent variable" and the other with θ_t as the right side variable. Both are valid representations. Which representation is better in terms of understanding forces shaping the plan?

To answer that question, we would have to deploy more economic theory in order to discover that (18) is actually a better way to represent a Ramsey plan, as Chang (1998) showed.

We close this paper by reviewing an insight of Chang (1998), who noticed that equation (5) indicates that an equivalence class of continuation money growth sequences $\{\mu_{t+j}\}_{j=0}^{\infty}$ delivers the same θ_t. Consequently, equations (3) and (5) describe how θ_t intermediates in how the government's choices of $\mu_{t+j},\ j = 0, 1, \ldots$ impinge on time t real balances $m_t - p_t = -\alpha\theta_t$ and thereby on time t welfare.

We can appreciate Chang's reasoning by thinking about the following "machine learning" procedure for computing continuation values from time 0 that start from an arbitrary initial inflation rate θ_0. For each $\theta_0 \in \mathbb{R}$, define a set

$$\Omega(\theta_0) = \left\{ \{\theta_{t+1}, \mu_t\}_{t=0}^{\infty} : \theta_{t+1} = \lambda^{-1}\theta_t + (1 - \lambda^{-1})\mu_t,\ \forall t \geq 0, \vec{\theta} \in L^2 \right\}.$$

For a given θ_0, use machine learning to compute a closed loop policy

$$\theta_t = f(t; \theta_0), \quad t \geq 1,$$

which solves the maximization problem on the right side of the following equation for a **continuation value function** $J(\theta_0)$:

$$J(\theta_0) = \max_{\{\theta_{t+1},\mu_t\}_{t=0}^{\infty} \in \Omega(\theta_0)} \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \beta^t s(\theta_t, \mu_t).$$

If we did this for a set of different possible θ_0's and then studied how $J(\theta_0)$ varies with θ_0, we would discover that

$$J(\theta_0) = g_0 + g_1\theta_0 + g_2\theta_0^2,$$

where the right side is the same quadratic value function that we constructed earlier. We could then hand the function $J(\theta_0)$ over to our Ramsey planner and compute the Ramsey planner's choice of θ_0 according to

$$\theta_0 = \theta_0^R = \arg\max_{\theta} J(\theta) = -\frac{g_1}{2g_2}.$$

Finally, we could compute the value of the Ramsey plan as

$$v_0^R = \max_{\theta} J(\theta).$$

We have come to the threshold of the formulation of the analysis of Chang (1998). He noticed that a continuation Ramsey planner's value function satisfies the Bellman equation

$$J(\theta) = \max_{\mu,\theta'}\{s(\theta, \mu) + \beta J(\theta')\}, \tag{19}$$

where maximization is subject to

$$\theta' = \lambda^{-1}\theta + (1 - \lambda^{-1})\mu.$$

In a sequel to this paper, we shall describe Chang's use of **dynamic programming squared** in which the state variable θ that appears in Bellman equation (19) satisfies (5). We can regard this equation as another Bellman equation, one that expresses θ_t as a function of next period's θ_{t+1}. The argument θ in Bellman equation (19) is thus a value governed by another Bellman equation, leading us to call this an instance of a dynamic programming squared problem.[6] We will discuss these interpretations of Chang's state variable in the sequel.

Notes

1. Work of Olivera (1970, 1971) about "passive money" influenced Sargent and Wallace (1973).
2. When there is no uncertainty, an assumption of **rational expectations** becomes equivalent to **perfect foresight**.
3. A "bliss level" of real balances is $\frac{u_1}{u_2}$; the inflation rate that attains it is $-\frac{u_1}{u_2\alpha}$.
4. In the appendix, we describe and deploy a more sophisticated method to compute the value function.
5. Thus, our "fake data" set is just the Ramsey plan generated by our open loop formula for μ_t as a function of t and formula (5) that takes the future μ^t and maps it into θ_t.

6. In Chang's model, θ_t simultaneously plays multiple roles as inflation target, actual inflation, promised inflation, and expected inflation.

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A Faster Machine Learning Algorithm

By thinking about the mathematical structure of the Ramsey problem and using some linear algebra, we can simplify the problem that we hand over to a machine learning algorithm.

We start by recalling that the Ramsey problem that chooses $\vec{\mu}$ to maximize the government's value function (11), subject to equation (10).

This turns out to be an optimization problem with a quadratic objective function and linear constraints. First-order conditions for this problem are a set of simultaneous linear equations in $\vec{\mu}$. If we trust that the second-order conditions for a maximum are also satisfied (they are in our problem), we can compute the Ramsey plan by solving these equations for $\vec{\mu}$.

Remember that we have assumed that

$$\mu_t = \mu_T \ \forall t \geq T$$

and that

$$\theta_t = \theta_T = \mu_T \ \forall t \geq T.$$

Again, define

$$\vec{\theta} = \begin{bmatrix} \theta_0 \\ \theta_1 \\ \vdots \\ \theta_{T-1} \\ \theta_T \end{bmatrix}, \quad \vec{\mu} = \begin{bmatrix} \mu_0 \\ \mu_1 \\ \vdots \\ \mu_{T-1} \\ \mu_T \end{bmatrix}.$$

Write the system of $T + 1$ equations (13) that relate $\vec{\theta}$ to a choice of $\vec{\mu}$ as the single matrix equation

$$\frac{1}{(1-\lambda)}\begin{bmatrix}1 & -\lambda & 0 & 0 & \cdots & 0 & 0\\ 0 & 1 & -\lambda & 0 & \cdots & 0 & 0\\ 0 & 0 & 1 & -\lambda & \cdots & 0 & 0\\ \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & -\lambda & 0\\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & \cdots & 1 & -\lambda\\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & \cdots & 0 & 1-\lambda\end{bmatrix}\begin{bmatrix}\theta_0\\ \theta_1\\ \theta_2\\ \vdots\\ \theta_{T-1}\\ \theta_T\end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix}\mu_0\\ \mu_1\\ \mu_2\\ \vdots\\ \mu_{T-1}\\ \mu_T\end{bmatrix}$$

or

$$A\vec{\theta} = \vec{\mu}.$$

Let $B := A^{-1}$, and we can write

$$\vec{\theta} = B\vec{\mu}.$$

As was the case before, the Ramsey planner's criterion is

$$V = \sum_{t=0}^{\infty}\beta^t(h_0 + h_1\theta_t + h_2\theta_t^2 - \frac{c}{2}\mu_t^2).$$

With our assumption above, criterion V can be rewritten as

$$V = \sum_{t=0}^{T-1}\beta^t(h_0 + h_1\theta_t + h_2\theta_t^2 - \frac{c}{2}\mu_t^2) + \frac{\beta^T}{1-\beta}(h_0 + h_1\theta_T + h_2\theta_T^2 - \frac{c}{2}\mu_T^2).$$

To help us write V as a quadratic plus affine form, define

$$\vec{\beta} = \begin{bmatrix}1\\ \beta\\ \vdots\\ \beta^{T-1}\\ \frac{\beta^T}{1-\beta}\end{bmatrix}.$$

Then, we have

$$h_1\sum_{t=0}^{\infty}\beta^t\theta_t = h_1\cdot\vec{\beta}^T\vec{\theta} = (h_1\cdot B^T\vec{\beta})^T\vec{\mu} = g^T\vec{\mu},$$

where $g = h_1\cdot B^T\vec{\beta}$ is a $(T+1)\times 1$ vector,

$$h_2\sum_{t=0}^{\infty}\beta^t\theta_t^2 = \vec{\mu}^T(B^T(h_2\cdot\vec{\beta}\cdot\mathbf{I})B)\vec{\mu} = \vec{\mu}^T M\vec{\mu},$$

where $M = B^T(h_2 \cdot \vec{\beta} \cdot \mathbf{I})B$ is a $(T+1) \times (T+1)$ matrix and

$$\frac{c}{2}\sum_{t=0}^{\infty}\beta^t \mu_t^2 = \vec{\mu}^T(\frac{c}{2} \cdot \vec{\beta} \cdot \mathbf{I})\vec{\mu} = \vec{\mu}^T F \vec{\mu},$$

where $F = \frac{c}{2} \cdot \vec{\beta} \cdot \mathbf{I}$ is a $(T+1) \times (T+1)$ matrix.

It follows that

$$\begin{aligned} J = V - h_0 &= \sum_{t=0}^{\infty}\beta^t(h_1\theta_t + h_2\theta_t^2 - \frac{c}{2}\mu_t^2) \\ &= g^T\vec{\mu} + \vec{\mu}^T M \vec{\mu} - \vec{\mu}^T F \vec{\mu} \\ &= g^T\vec{\mu} + \vec{\mu}^T(M - F)\vec{\mu} \\ &= g^T\vec{\mu} + \vec{\mu}^T G \vec{\mu}, \end{aligned}$$

where $G = M - F$.

To compute the optimal government plan, we want to maximize J with respect to $\vec{\mu}$.

We use linear algebra formulas for differentiating linear and quadratic forms to compute the gradient of J with respect to $\vec{\mu}$:

$$\nabla_{\vec{\mu}} J = g + 2G\vec{\mu}.$$

Setting $\nabla_{\vec{\mu}} J = 0$, we see that the maximizing μ is

$$\vec{\mu}^R = -\frac{1}{2}G^{-1}g.$$

The associated optimal inflation sequence is

$$\vec{\theta}^R = B\vec{\mu}^R.$$

To implement this, we can update our gradient ascent exercise in Algorithm 2 with J and its gradient. This allows us to vectorize the operations. We find that by exploiting more knowledge about the structure of the problem, we can accelerate computation.[1]

Notes

1. For a detailed camparison of computation time, please see the companion QuantEcon lecture (https://python-advanced.quantecon.org/calvo_machine_learn.html#two-implementations).