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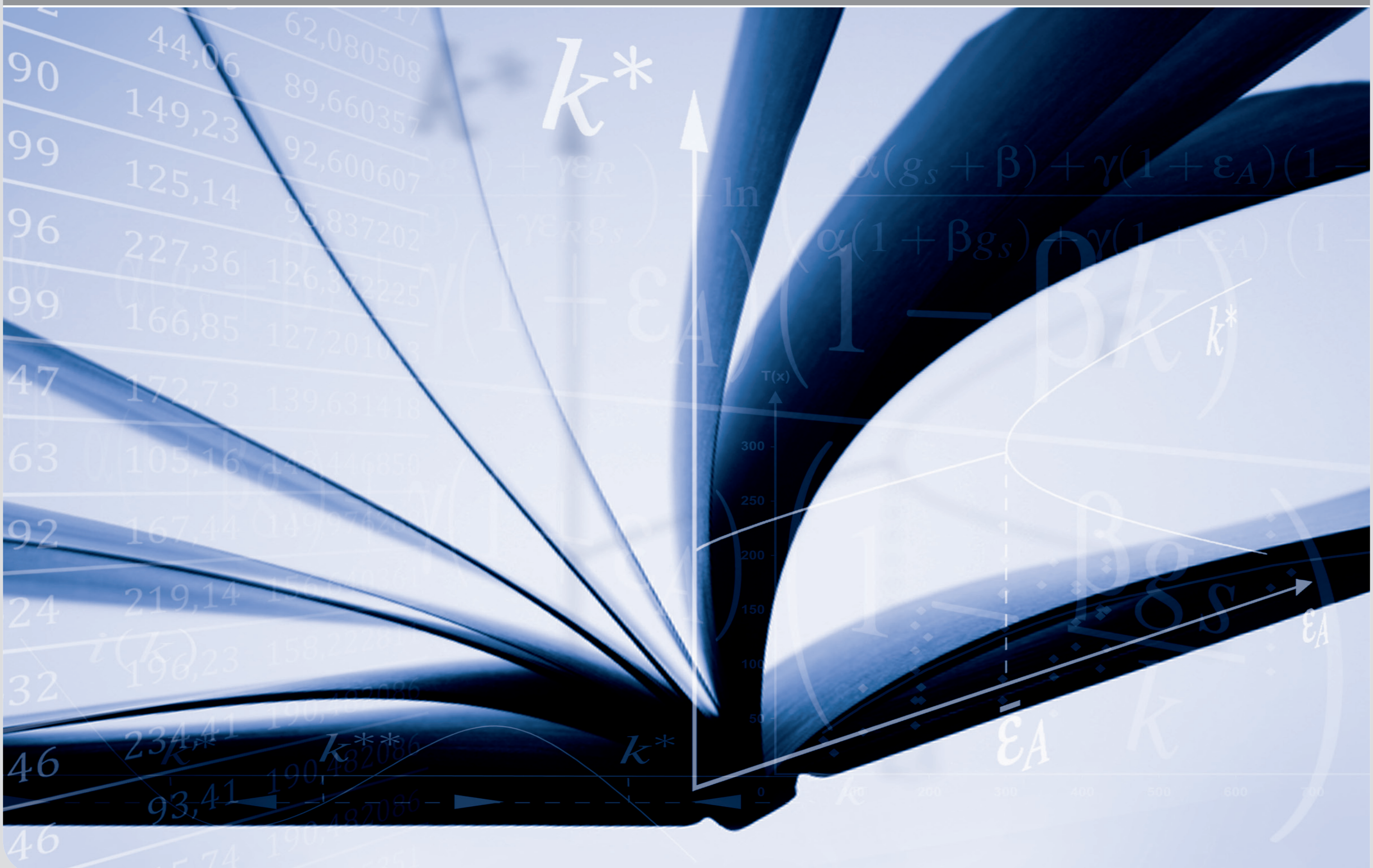

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Optimal Revelation of Life-Changing Information*

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Abstract

Information about the future may be instrumentally useful, yet scary. For example, many patients shy away from precise genetic tests about their dispositions for severe diseases. They are afraid that a bad test result could render them desperate due to anticipatory feelings. We show that partially revealing tests are typically optimal when anticipatory utility interacts with an instrumental need for information. The same result emerges when patients rely on probability weighting. Optimal tests provide only two signals, which renders them easily implementable. While the good signal is typically precise, the bad one remains coarse. This way, patients have a substantial chance to learn that they are free of the genetic risk in question. Yet even if the test outcome is bad, they do not end in a situation of no hope.

JEL Classification: D81, D82

Keywords: Test Design, Revelation of Information, Design of Beliefs, Medical Tests, Anticipatory Utility, Huntington's Disease

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1 Introduction

It is one of the most elementary principles of decision theory that agents prefer to have as much information as possible before making a decision. More information allows agents to fine-tune their decisions. For example, planning the future becomes easier when knowing the challenges that lie ahead.

The following thought experiment may illustrate why nevertheless there are contexts in which information is not necessarily desirable: Imagine there was a test that could determine whether you survive the next t years or not. Set t to a relevant value, e.g., about half the time you expect to survive from now on. Assume that for some reason you are entirely confident about the accuracy of the test. Would you want to get this information? Contrary to the reasoning in the first paragraph, this is a question many people find difficult to answer.

While most people are currently not confronted with such a fundamental testing decision, people under risk of having inherited Huntington's disease are. Huntington's disease is a severe genetic disorder which breaks out around the age of 40. As more and more cells get damaged by the disease both mental and physical health deteriorate. After some years, patients end up in dementia and disability, needing full-time care. Patients die 20 years younger than other people on average. There is no cure for Huntington's disease. Children of patients have a 50% risk of having inherited the disease (provided that exactly one parent has it). Consequently, the risk for grandchildren is 25%. Since the 1980s, a genetic test is available which allows to almost perfectly determine if a person will eventually get the disease.

People under risk often find it difficult to decide whether to take the test or not. There are books solely dedicated to this decision.[1] Many people postpone the decision, they wait for years before eventually taking the test. The problem of testing for Huntington's disease may seem like a – disturbingly severe – minority problem. Yet likely, this type of problem will become more wide-spread as research into human genetics progresses and more and more genetic dispositions become detectable. We will employ this testing decision as our running example in the following.

[1] See, e.g., Baréma (2005).

This paper presents a simple but robust model that aims at capturing why tests that provide life-changing outcomes can be challenging. To this end, we blend risk preferences regarding anticipated outcomes with instrumental information. We study the design of optimal tests in this setup. Optimal tests often turn out to be coarse. They either provide a perfectly informative signal in the good domain, then, the genetic risk is absent. Or they provide a coarse bad signal, which means that the patient has to correct his hope to stay healthy downwards. In the latter case, there still remains justified reason to hope that the disease will not break out as the coarse signal emerges from pooling.[2] This differentiates the coarse test from the precise one. We also show that when a patient relies on prominent forms of probability weighting regarding future outcomes the results remain robust.

This type of test is easily illustrated in terms of our thought experiment from the beginning. Imagine that with a probability of 50% you will survive the next t years. Consider a test that provides only two outcomes: If you will live for more than these t years, the test reveals this with a probability of, say, 30%. In all other cases, you receive a pooling signal which implies that you have to adjust your life expectancy slightly downwards. Thus, taking the test offers the possibility of getting good news while you never receive information that you will die within the next t years for sure. Taking such a test may feel less scary than a precise one.

The medical literature has discussed the careful use of precise tests extensively[3] but has not looked into the possibility of letting patients choose between precise and coarse tests. While new in medical testing, randomized mechanisms are well-established in a variety of other contexts. Examples range from complex random procedures for determining start configurations in sports contests (such as in the soccer world cup) to randomized pricing in the airline industry.[4] We emphasize in this paper that the technical progress in the design of information structures allows for better test design when it comes to crucial, potentially life-changing tests as in medical

[2] Thus there are no false negatives, while false positives occur. Here, we use the term positive as in "HIV-positive".

[3] For example, basic fertility tests, though cheap, are recommended only to couples who have unsuccessfully tried for one year to become pregnant, see the current guidelines of the CDC or the British NHS. Recently, the PSA test (an indicator for prostate cancer) was criticized heavily for being overused on patients, see, e.g., Walter et al. (2006).

[4] See also Kamenica and Gentzkow (2011) for a recent contribution regarding strategic randomization in information transmission as applicable in litigation.

contexts as well.

The key idea behind our model is that an agent's utility at a given point in time is influenced not only by his current situation but also by expected future prospects. This is the anticipatory utility approach put forward by Loewenstein (1987), see below for more references. For a very simple example of anticipatory utility, people look forward to holidays in Hawaii and this may lift up their spirits even months before the journey begins. Notably, what influences their utility *now* is not how those holidays will actually turn out to be, but how they expect them to be. This idea is subtly yet crucially different from the classical assumption that an agent only takes into account the (discounted) utility he enjoys at a later point in time when making a decision.

Agreeing to receive a piece of information is, so to say, equivalent to entering a gamble over anticipated utility outcomes which – by Bayesian rationality – leaves the status quo unchanged in expectation. Thus, other factors aside, an agent who is risk-averse with respect to anticipated utility will never want to receive any information about the future – while an agent who is "risk-loving", i.e. eager to learn about the future, would opt for precise information. The risk aversion in our model is hence analogous to the standard concept of risk aversion with the only difference that it applies to anticipated outcomes instead of realized physical outcomes.

In addition to anticipatory utility our model incorporates costs. Agents with better information make better decisions, e.g. better suited career or family plans. Under risk aversion regarding anticipated payoffs, this leads to a trade-off. Getting more information allows to make better plans for the future, but it also increases the risk of obtaining bad information that will lower anticipatory utility.

Our model and analysis can easily be augmented to include other behavioral aspects. Anticipatory utility has been identified as a plausible factor in decisions about receiving crucial information about the future. There may be alternative or additional reasons why patients shy away from medical tests. Likewise, avoiding costs from less than optimal plans for the future need not be the only argument in favor of perfectly revelatory tests.[5] We design optimal tests when there are conflicting forces at work. As a concrete example, we adapt the analysis to a

[5]Another reason could be curiosity, which, as we will see, can be covered by the analysis as well.

setting where patients use probability weighting to evaluate the likelihood of different health outcomes. The difference between being healthy with a probability of 95% or 100% may be perceived as much greater than the difference between 50% and 60%. This is the famous "underweighting of high probabilities" pointed out by Kahneman and Tversky (1979). Even in the absence of instrumental information, probability weighting leads to the same structure of optimal tests as before. Probability weighting is thus a second, independent factor in favor of tests that either deliver clear-cut good news, or a coarse bad signals.

Section 2 introduces our basic model of medical testing in the presence of anticipatory utility and instrumental information. In Section 3, we solve the decision problem of a doctor designing an optimal test for a patient. Section 4 introduces additional assumptions under which the optimal test provides either clear-cut good news or a pooling signal that corrects beliefs about staying healthy downwards. This test structure emerges when the quality of life plans primarily hinges on the precision of information about the future, and if information aversion is more pronounced for bad outcomes than for good ones. Section 5 adapts our framework, allowing anticipatory utility to depend on behaviorally weighted probabilities. Again, the same test structures turn out to be optimal. Section 6 concludes. All proofs are in the appendix.

1.1 Related Literature

Contributions such as Loewenstein (1987), Caplin and Leahy (2001), Brunnermeier and Parker (2005), Epstein (2008), Kadane, Schervish and Seidenfeld (2008) and Golman and Loewenstein (2012) have developed concepts of anticipatory utility in the behavioral economics literature. Building on this research, Caplin and Leahy (2004), Caplin and Eliaz (2003), Kőszegi (2003, 2006) and Oster, Dorsey and Shoulson (2013) study information transmission in doctor-patient relations. The main distinction between our work and most of these contributions is that we focus on the design of optimal tests that can be partially revelatory.

Caplin and Leahy (2004) study testing decisions under anticipatory utility yet in the absence of instrumental information. Kőszegi (2003, 2006) blend anticipatory utility with costs of suboptimal decisions. Kőszegi (2003) focuses on patients' preferences with regard to perfectly revelatory tests. Kőszegi (2006) studies the exchange of information between doctor and patient in a cheap-talk game in which the doctor is severely limited in his power to commit on truthfulness. The patient has to choose between taking a therapy or not. For the doctor, as he cares about the patient's well-being, this creates an incentive to downplay the severeness of the patient's illness (as long as the patient still takes the therapy).[6] Yet the patient understands this, and therefore, the doctor can only credibly release rough signals about the health status of the patient.[7] In a sense complementary to this analysis, we focus on the case where commitment is possible as, e.g., in genetic testing, as hard information can be generated in this case and the doctor does not receive more information than the patient himself. See also the discussion at the end of Section 2. Finally, in an empirical study, Oster, Dorsey and Shoulson (2013) show that anticipatory utility can well explain observed decisions for and against taking the perfectly revelatory test for Huntington's disease.

To our knowledge, Caplin and Eliaz (2003) is the only other paper which considers optimal test design under anticipatory utility. The authors focus on tests for HIV. They suggest partially revelatory certificates as a way to motivate agents with anticipatory utility to get tested at all. Caplin and Eliaz identify a testing procedure that yields an 'infection-free" equilibrium such that HIV is no longer transmitted to healthy people. The test is thus designed with a different intent, namely protecting healthy people. The well-being of an individual patient is a potential constraint that does not allow the test-designer to implement the first best solution which would be a perfectly revelatory test. Thus there is a conflict of interest between test-designer and potentially infected patients. This is different from our analysis, where doctor's and patient's interests are perfectly aligned. The goal is to identify the optimal test according to an individual patient's needs.

Eliaz and Spiegler (2006) have argued that models of anticipatory utility have difficulties in capturing the following phenomenon. Patients with a high probability of being healthy are more information-seeking than patients with a low probability. However, in the settings of Sections 4

[6] The doctor would thus release messages like "It looks basically fine but we may nevertheless do the therapy to be on the safe side..."

[7] Kőszegi (2006) also briefly considers the case where the doctor can commit on truthful revelation. Yet under his assumptions on preferences and costs, this always leads to full revelation.

and 5, we observe this type of behavior. The optimal test is non-revealing for small priors and partially revealing for large priors. We discuss how our findings can be reconciled with their results at the end of Section 4.

There has been some debate about revealed-preference foundations for anticipatory utility (Eliaz and Spiegler, 2006, Epstein, 2008). Further, it may be difficult for a doctor to infer a patient's exact preferences for information. Our contribution is, in a sense, orthogonal to this discussion. We argue that the same small family of tests emerges as optimal under a broad class of preferences. Thus, offering the patient some tests from that family can be a good idea even without knowledge of his exact preferences.

From a technical point of view, our paper is related to works on strategic conflict in information transmission: Rosar (2014) also considers test design. The characterization of optimal signals in Kamenica and Gentzkow (2011) crucially relies on a classical result from geometric moment theory (Kemperman, 1968) which is also the key in our derivation of optimal tests. These papers focus on problems caused by strategic interaction between economic agents. We consider problems caused by the need to control one's own expectations. In our model, there is no conflict of interest when it comes to information transmission.

2 The Basic Model

Consider the following game between a receiver of information ("the patient") and a revealer of information ("the doctor"). Doctor and patient share the goal of maximizing the patient's utility. They also have the same information about the patient's preferences and the ex-ante situation. There is an initially unknown state of the world X which takes the values 1 and 0 with commonly known probabilities p and $1-p$.[8] Throughout, $X=1$ denotes the preferred outcome ("the patient is healthy"). $X=0$ denotes the unfavorable outcome ("the patient has a severe genetic mutation and will become ill"). The timing of the game is as follows.

(i) The doctor designs a test by specifying a signal S.[9] S is a random variable correlated with

[8] In applications such as genetic testing, such priors only hinge on which relatives of a patient are known to have the disease.

[9] Throughout, we use the words "signal" and "test" interchangeably. The former is more in line with the language of theoretical economics and the latter is more in line with the language of the doctor-patient relationship.

X.

(ii) The patient learns the distribution of S. He decides whether he wants to take the test and observe S, or not.

(iii) The patient forms a posterior belief B about the distribution of X. If he has taken the test, his belief to be healthy adjusts, $B = P[X = 1|S]$. If he opted against the test, B remains the prior belief, $B = p$.

(iv) The patient settles on a life plan, modeled as choosing a value $y \in [0, 1]$.

Both agents optimize the patient's expected realized utility given the information they have. This realized utility is given as the sum of three terms

$$U_c(X) + \theta U(E[X|B]) - (1 - \theta)C(X, y).$$

The term $U_c(X)$ captures the classical, "physical" utility from being healthy or ill. We assume U_c as an increasing function, thus $U_c(X)$ is largest when the patient is healthy.

The term $U(E[X|B])$ depends on the patient's posterior expectation of X.[10] This term captures anticipatory utility. For example, a patient may feel miserable knowing that he will become ill. Anticipating this, he may want to avoid a too revelatory test about his health condition. We assume U as increasing, continuous and concave.

The cost term C models how the patient can enhance his condition by a careful choice of life plan y. $C : \{0, 1\} \times [0, 1] \to \mathbb{R}$ has the property that for fixed $x \in \{0, 1\}$, $C(x, y)$ is continuous in y and takes its unique minimum in $C(x, x) = 0$. The cost term is thus minimal when the patient knows the state of the world X and can choose the best-suited life plan $y = X$. If the patient does not know X, he cannot adjust his plans optimally to his (future) health condition. This leads to costs out of suboptimal planning, $c(X, y)$. For example, the patient may want to opt for a different career plan, travel more or take more leisure time, care better about his savings,

[10] A credible testing procedure will have to obey the rules of Bayesian statistics. Resulting posteriors are communicated explicitly to the patient. This rules out misperceptions of probabilities. For potential effects of probability weighting, see Section 5.

or buy a home close to his family instead of moving far away or even abroad if he knows he is going to become ill eventually.

$\theta \in [0, 1]$ is a parameter that captures how important anticipations are compared to choosing a good life plan. We will later vary θ in order to investigate the interplay of the two terms.

We think of $U_c(X)$, U, and C as aggregates over all future time periods, i.e., discounted sums of future physical utilities, future anticipations, and future costs of having chosen a life plan y which is – ex post – suboptimal. Likewise, the choice of life plan y should be understood as an aggregate over many decisions (occupational choice, investment and saving plans, etc.). If we think of X as a genetic indicator of whether a disease will eventually break out, the patient inevitably observes X in the far future. Accordingly, the life plan y only captures decisions made before that point in time.

Two simplifications of the game are immediate. The physical utility term $U_c(X)$ is unaffected by the doctor's and the patient's decisions. It thus does not play any role in the later analysis. Likewise, the doctor will always propose the best possible test for the patient. We can thus assume without loss of generality that the patient accepts the test in stage (ii) of the game. If the patient would refuse any (partially) revelatory test, the doctor offers an uninformative test, As we will see, the doctor may propose a test that is completely uninformative, or a test that is only partially revealing.

We assume that the doctor can offer the test the patient likes best. For instance, he may send instructions for generating the test to a medical laboratory. With regard to genetic testing, many noisy signals can be created by mixing blood samples of different patients and just testing the mixed sample for the genetic mutation of interest.[11] Assume the blood of two people at risk is mixed and then tested with a precise test: If the mixed blood sample is clean, both patients are free of the genetic mutation. If the mixed blood sample contains the mutation, either one of the patients carries the mutation, or both do. This test thus generates a noisy signal. Of course, another way to generate noisy signals is via computerized, anonymous processes.

[11] In other medical contexts, e.g., to ensure safety of blood donations, testing mixed samples is a known procedure for reducing costs, see Section 6 for more discussion.

Some authors have emphasized that preferences for information are influenced by their accessibility.[12] Indeed, a patient will likely be influenced by knowing that a sheet of paper with his diagnosis is hidden in a stack of documents right in front of him. However, it is easy to anonymize the testing procedure in a way that no such sheet of paper exists and that the doctor does not have access to X either.

3 Optimization

This section focuses on the Perfect Bayesian Equilibrium (PBE) of the doctor-patient game. Proposition 1 and 2 characterize, respectively, the beliefs induced by an optimal test and the optimal test itself. Proposition 3 describes how the optimal test becomes more revelatory if the costs of making wrong decisions become more important compared to the anticipatory effects.

In order to find the equilibria, let us first consider the patient's choice of y given that B has taken the realization $B = b$. Ignoring terms that are independent of y, the patient's problem to choose a good life plan y is given by

$$\min_y c(b, y) \text{ where } c(b, y) = b\, C(1, y) + (1 - b)\, C(0, y).$$

Since $c(b, y)$ is continuous in $y \in [0, 1]$, an optimal choice of y exists for all b. We denote it by $y^*(b)$. The costs given that the patient behaves optimally are thus

$$c^*(b) = c(b, y^*(b)).$$

Our first result shows that c^* is concave in b.

Lemma 1. *The function $c^*(b)$ is continuous and concave in $b \in [0, 1]$.*

We now turn to the doctor's task of designing the optimal test for the patient. We take an indirect approach. First, we determine the optimal belief B^*. Then we construct a test that induces this belief. To this end, denote by $\mathcal{B}$ the set of random variables valued in $[0, 1]$ that

[12] See Golman and Loewenstein (2012) for a model which takes these aspects into account.

have mean p. By Bayesian consistency, the doctor cannot induce any belief outside of $\mathcal{B}$, as the prior needs to be preserved in expectation.[13] The set $\mathcal{B}$ thus encodes all possible tests, including the special cases of perfect revelation ($B \in \{0, 1\}$) and no revelation ($B = p$ a.s.).

The doctor aims at maximizing the patient's expected utility, assuming the patient chooses the conditionally optimal life plan y^* based on the test result:

$$\max_{B \in \mathcal{B}} E[V(B)] \text{ where } V(b) = \theta U(b) - (1-\theta)c^*(b). \tag{1}$$

Here, we have ignored the term $E[U_c(X)]$ since, by the law of iterated expectations, it does not affect the maximization problem. Further, we have used that $E[X|B] = B$ and thus $U(E[X|B]) = U(B)$. By assumption, U is concave. Moreover, Lemma 1 has shown that $-c^*$ is convex. Thus, for $\theta \in (0, 1)$, the function V is generally continuous but neither convex nor concave. This stems from the conflict that lies at the heart of the problem: The more standard cost-term from choosing an unsuitable life plan, $E[-c^*(B)]$, demands resolution of uncertainty. Yet the anticipatory utility term, $E[U(B)]$, suggests to avoid information.

U does not need to be globally concave for this conflict to arise. As soon as V is non-convex, the optimal test should not be fully revealing for some priors p. Similarly, our analysis is robust to further psychological factors such as anxiety, curiosity, fear, etc. The sole property of V that is used in the following is that it is a continuous function.[14] For instance, we could add a term $\gamma F(b)$ modeling curiosity to the function V. In order to capture that a more informative signal satisfies the patient's curiosity better, we could assume that F is strictly convex. This would not require any changes to our analysis (and we could conclude that for sufficiently large γ the incentives for receiving as much information as possible become dominant). Formally, a similar trade-off between concavity and convexity also lies at the heart of Kamenica and Gentzkow (2011)'s results on partial revelation in strategic information transmission. In their setting, one agent, the sender, can observe the state of the world. His utility depends on the decision

[13] It can be shown that the doctor can induce any $B \in \mathcal{B}$, see Shmaya and Yariv (2009). Since we will first determine the optimum $B^* \in \mathcal{B}$ and then implement it directly, this type of result is not needed here.

[14] This continuity is a convenient technical assumption since it implies that V attains intermediate values, maxima and minima. It can be relaxed at the expense of more complicated statements of the results. See Section 5.2 for an application where V is discontinuous.

made by another agent, the receiver, who uses the information he receives to maximize his own utility. When preferences are aligned, full revelation is optimal in their setting. In contrast, in our analysis it turns out that full revelation is often dominated by less revelatory information structures.

The optimization problem (1) is a classical problem in geometric moment theory which was solved independently by various authors in the 1950s. We refer to Kemperman (1968) for an overview of the earlier literature. To our knowledge, Richter (1957) contains the first published statement of a result which immediately implies Proposition 1 below.[15] For ease of reference, we provide a short and non-technical exposition of how to solve (1) which is given in the proof of Proposition 1.

The key observation is that the patient's utility from the optimal test is given by $\overline{V}(p)$ where $\overline{V}$ is the smallest concave function weakly greater than V. Moreover, the optimal test can be read off from the graph of $\overline{V}$ as is depicted in Figure 1.

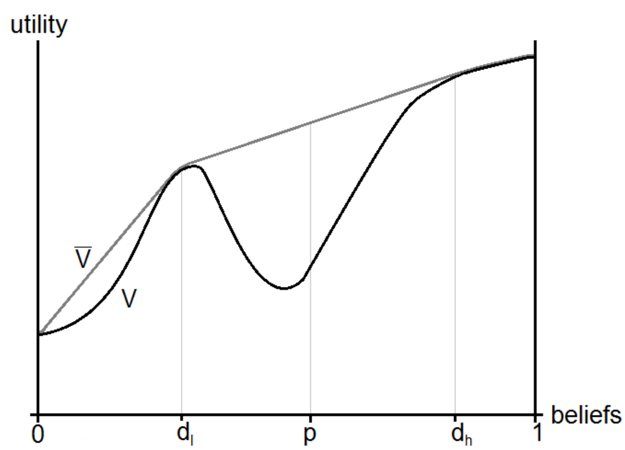

Figure 1: Construction of $\overline{V}$

For illustration, consider a test inducing a belief B that takes only the two values $d_l < p < d_h$. The patient's utility from this test can be found graphically by connecting the points $(d_l, V(d_l))$

[15]For a broader perspective on moment problems, generalized Chebychev inequalities and applications in decision analysis, see Smith (1995). The result is also a key ingredient in Kamenica and Gentzkow's (2011) analysis of strategic information transmission. Earlier applications of similar techniques in the context of strategic information transmission are found in Aumann and Maschler (1995).

and $(d_h, V(d_h))$ and evaluating the value of the resulting line segment at p. Since $\overline{V}$ can be characterized as the supremum over all line segments which connect two points in the graph of V, $\overline{V}(p)$ is exactly what the optimal test can achieve. The proof of Proposition 1 demonstrates this point in more detail. It also shows that beliefs B which take more than two values cannot achieve more than $\overline{V}(p)$.

Proposition 1. *Denote by $\overline{V}$ the smallest concave function with $\overline{V}(b) \geq V(b)$ for all $b \in [0,1]$. Then a solution $B^* \in \mathcal{B}$ to (1) is given as follows:*

(i) If $\overline{V}(p) = V(p)$ then $B^* = p$ with probability 1.

(ii) If $\overline{V}(p) > V(p)$ denote by $I = (b_l, b_h) \subset [0,1]$ the largest open interval with $p \in I$ and $\overline{V}(b) > V(b)$ for all $b \in I$. Then B^* takes values b_h and b_l with probabilities

$$p_h = \frac{p - b_l}{b_h - b_l} \text{ and } p_l = 1 - p_h.$$

In both cases, $E[V(B^*)] = \overline{V}(p)$.

Existence of $\overline{V}$ is ensured since the convex hull of the graph of V exists and $\overline{V}$ is the upper contour of that convex hull. It is easy to check that B^* is unique if there are no subintervals of $[0,1]$ on which V is linear.

To get some more intuition for the objects in the proposition, consider the case of $\theta = 0$, i.e., the case of a patient who only cares about early resolution of uncertainty. Then V is convex and accordingly, $\overline{V}$ is given by the straight line connecting $(0, V(0))$ and $(1, V(1))$. In that case, $\overline{V}(b) > V(b)$ for all $b \in (0,1)$ and the proposition implies that B^* takes values 0 and 1 with probabilities $1-p$ and p. Thus the patient perfectly learns from the test whether $X = 0$ or $X = 1$. In the case where $\theta = 1$, i.e., for a patient whose interests are dominated by anticipatory utility, V is concave and thus $\overline{V} \equiv V$. Accordingly, we are in case (i) of the proposition and the optimal belief B^* coincides with the prior p. Hence the optimal test does not reveal anything. In the case where V and $\overline{V}$ coincide on some interval, it depends on the prior p whether the optimal test should reveal something or not.

Proposition 1 characterizes the structure of optimal beliefs. In particular, it shows that optimal beliefs B^* lie in the subset $\mathcal{B}_2 \subset \mathcal{B}$. Here, $\mathcal{B}_2$ is defined as the set of random variables on $[0, 1]$ which have mean p and which take only two values b_l and b_h where $b_l \leq b_h$. Thus, to derive the optimal signals, it suffices to show that for any $B \in \mathcal{B}_2$ there exists a signal S which induces B. This is the result of the following proposition.

Proposition 2. *Fix $0 \leq b_l < p < b_h \leq 1$ and consider the random variable S with values in $\{\text{“Good”}, \text{“Bad”}\}$ that is generated upon observing X as follows:*
If $X = 1$ then

$$S = \begin{cases} \text{“Good”} & \textit{with probability } \alpha \\ \text{“Bad”} & \textit{with probability } 1 - \alpha. \end{cases}$$

If $X = 0$ then

$$S = \begin{cases} \text{“Good”} & \textit{with probability } \beta \\ \text{“Bad”} & \textit{with probability } 1 - \beta, \end{cases}$$

where $\alpha, \beta \in [0, 1]$ are given by

$$\alpha = \frac{b_h}{p} \frac{p - b_l}{b_h - b_l} \quad \textit{and } \beta = \frac{1 - b_h}{1 - p} \frac{p - b_l}{b_h - b_l}.$$

The resulting belief $B = P[X = 1|S]$ only takes values in $\{b_l, b_h\}$ and $E[B] = p$.

Here, $S =$ “Good” is better news than $S =$ “Bad” since it induces the higher posterior probability b_h of the good state of the world $X = 1$. It is straightforward to rewrite the test of Proposition 2 in a way that X only needs to be observed with some probability.

We close this section with some qualitative results on optimal tests. The first result confirms the intuition that smaller values of θ – representing a higher significance of the cost term – lead to more precise tests.

Proposition 3. *Fix $p \in (0, 1)$ and $\theta > \theta'$. Denote by $\{b_l, b_h\}$ and $\{b_l', b_h'\}$ the values taken by the optimal belief under, respectively, θ and θ'. Then $b_l \geq b_l'$ and $b_h \leq b_h'$. Thus the optimal test under θ' leads to beliefs which are closer to knowledge of X than the optimal test under θ.*

The next result further illustrates the structure of optimal tests and states the following: Consider only tests which take two values and fix the lower of the induced beliefs d_l to a value which is less informative than optimal, $d_l \in (b_l, p)$. What is the optimal induced upper belief d_h^*? Proposition 4 shows that $d_h^* \in (p, b_h]$, implying that if a test is less informative than optimal in one direction, it is best to leave it less informative than optimal in the other direction, too.

Proposition 4. *Define the prior p and the values of an optimal belief $\{b_l, b_h\}$ as above. Assume that $b_l < p < b_h$ and fix some $d_l \in (b_l, p)$. For $d_h \in (p, 1)$, denote by $D(d_l, d_h) \in \mathcal{B}$ the random variable with mean p which takes only values d_l and d_h. Assume there exists d_h such that $E[V(D(d_l, d_h))] > E[V(p)]$ so that some beliefs $D(d_l, d_h)$ are better than no information. Then, if d_h^* is a solution to*

$$\max_{d_h} E[V(D(d_l, d_h))],$$

it must hold that $d_h^* \leq b_h$.

We have considered the case where d_l is fixed and d_h is variable. The argument for the opposite case is analogous.

4 Accuracy on Good News

Sometimes it may be difficult to observe, or communicate, the utility function V in its entirety. Moreover, even if V is completely known, constructing the optimal test remains a two-dimensional optimization problem. Thus, even though the optimal test is easy in the sense that it just provides two potential results, there may still be challenges when designing it. In this section, we restrict the functions $U(\cdot)$ and $C(\cdot, \cdot)$ a bit more. The quality of a life plan will hinge on how far away it is from the ex post optimal one, and the patient will be specifically scared about receiving very bad news. Designing the optimal test then reduces to determining one single parameter. The optimal test structure becomes as follows: The test may perfectly reveal the good state of the world, but it never perfectly reveals the bad state. In other words, there are no false signals of disease-freeness, while false positives occur. A patient thus either learns that he remains healthy for sure, or he receives a pooling signal. In the latter case, his belief of staying healthy is corrected downwards, but not to zero.[16] In the terminology of Proposition 2, the optimal test is characterized by $\alpha \in (0,1)$ and $\beta = 0$. Such a test structure emerges for example if V is concave on pessimistic beliefs and convex on optimistic ones as we will see in the following.

Assumption 1. *Let V be continuously differentiable and assume there exists a point $b_c \in (0,1)$ such that $V(b)$ is strictly concave on $[0, b_c]$ and strictly convex on $[b_c, 1]$.*

The idea is that for pessimistic beliefs about staying healthy, the anticipatory utility term is dominant, while the cost term dominates for optimistic beliefs. Such situations occur if costs of making suboptimal plans hinge on the distance to the ex-post optimal plan, while anticipatory utility is more sensitive to small changes in beliefs near the undesirable diagnosis $X = 0$. If patients are specifically scared of ending in a situation of no or very low hope, this assumption should be fulfilled. The following example provides concrete functional assumptions on U and C which describe such a setting. The calculations are in the appendix.

Example 1. *Suppose U is three times continuously differentiable with $U''' > 0$. For $x \in \{0,1\}$, the function $C(x,y)$ is given by $C(x,y) = (x-y)^2$. In this case, there exist thresholds $\theta_l \leq \theta_h$ in $[0,1]$ such that V is strictly concave for $\theta \geq \theta_h$ and strictly convex for $\theta \leq \theta_l$. For all $\theta \in (\theta_l, \theta_h)$, there exists a point $b_c \in (0,1)$ such that $V(b)$ is strictly concave on $[0, b_c]$ and strictly convex on $[b_c, 1]$.*

In the example, either costs or anticipatory utility dominate for extreme values of θ. This leads to perfectly revelatory or non-revelatory optimal tests. For intermediate values of θ we are in the setting of Assumption 1. Anticipatory utility dominates at pessimistic beliefs while the cost term dominates for optimistic beliefs. The idea behind the example is the following. Regarding anticipations, learning a bit more feels particularly risky if very bad outcomes are possible.[17]

[16] A similar class of tests was found optimal in Rosar (2014) in a model of strategic conflicts in information transmission. Caplin and Eliaz (2003) choose this type of test for implementing an "infection-free" equilibrium in their model of testing for AIDS.

[17] Recall that U is concave and thus U'' being increasing means that $U''(b)$ is closer to zero for larger b. The assumption of an increasing second derivative of U, $U''' > 0$, was coined "prudence" by Kimball (1990). It is a necessary condition for decreasing absolute risk aversion and thus satisfied by many of the standard utility functions.

With regard to the costs of an unsuited life-plan, it is only the distance to the ex-post optimal plan that matters.

The construction of $\overline{V}$ is depicted in Figure 2. Define for $z \in \mathbb{R}$ the linear function $g_z : [0,1] \to \mathbb{R}$ as the straight line connecting $(0, z)$ and $(1, V(1))$. Pick a value z^* such that g_{z^*} is tangential to V at some point $(b_t, V(b_t))$. Set $\overline{V}$ equal to V on $[0, b_t]$ and equal to g_{z^*} on $[b_t, 1]$. In the picture, it is evident that this construction yields a concave function which weakly dominates V. The next proposition shows that this construction always works and that the resulting function is indeed $\overline{V}$.

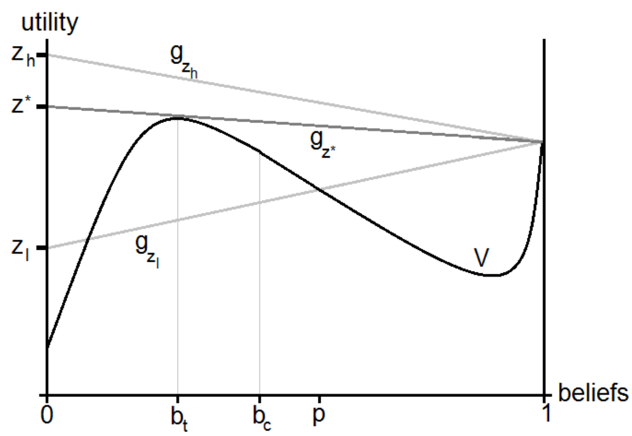

Figure 2: Construction of $\overline{V}$ under Assumption 1

Proposition 5. *Under Assumption 1, the function $\overline{V}$ can be constructed as follows.*

(i) If $g_{V(0)}(b) \geq V(b)$ for all $b \in [0,1]$, set $\overline{V} = g_{V(0)}$ and $b_t = 0$.

(ii) Otherwise, there exist a unique $z^* \in \mathbb{R}$ and $b_t \in (0, b_c]$ such that $g_{z^*}(b) \geq V(b)$ for all b and g_{z^*} is a tangent to V in b_t. Set

$$\overline{V}(b) = \begin{cases} V(b) & \text{if } b \leq b_t \\ g_{z^*}(b) & \text{if } b > b_t. \end{cases}$$

The boundary case (i) corresponds to the situation where the straight line connecting $(0, V(0))$ and $(1, V(1))$ dominates the graph of V for all b. In this case, full revelation is optimal at all priors. Case (ii) is depicted in Figure 2. In that case, the function $\overline{V}$ is first concave and then linear, making the optimal test prior-dependent. Combining the preceding analysis with the result of Proposition 2, allows us to explicitly state the optimal tests:

Proposition 6. *Under Assumption 1, the optimal test is as follows.*

(i) If $p \leq b_t$, the optimal test is perfectly non-revealing, e.g., $\alpha = \beta = 0$.

(ii) If $p > b_t$, the optimal belief B^* takes only values $b_l = b_t$ and $b_h = 1$. The resulting optimal test is given by

$$\alpha = \frac{1}{p}\frac{p - b_t}{1 - b_t} \quad \text{and} \quad \beta = 0.$$

Here, α and β are as defined in Proposition 2. Thus, for $b_t > 0$, the optimal test sometimes reveals $X = 1$ but never $X = 0$.

The analysis in this section shows that simple binary tests with $\alpha \in [0, 1]$ and $\beta = 0$ may be promising candidates to include into menus of tests. If a doctor wishes to propose some test options to a patient – in addition to the perfectly revelatory and perfectly non-revelatory tests represented by $\alpha \in \{0, 1\}$ and $\beta = 0$ – it might be a good starting point to include a discretization of the range of α, e.g. the three tests corresponding to $\alpha \in \{\frac{1}{4}, \frac{1}{2}, \frac{3}{4}\}$, and $\beta = 0$.

In the case $b_t > 0$ of Proposition 6, we see that patients with a small prior probability of the favorable outcome[18] refuse any further information. Patients with a larger prior will instead like a partially revealing test best.[19] The demand for information thus depends on the prior.

In contrast, Eliaz and Spiegler (2006) have argued that anticipatory utility cannot explain this intuitive type of preference reversal (see their Example 2). Their critique is based on the following result (their Proposition 2): Suppose the fully revealing test is either the best possible or the worst possible test for p close to 0 or for p close to 1. Then the fully revealing test is either best or worst for all $p \in [0, 1]$.[20] Yet note that this claim does not stand in conflict with our

[18]These people are in a sad kind of lottery-like situation as they only have a small chance of the good outcome.

[19]Moreover, under Assumption 1, patients with a sufficiently large prior typically prefer complete information over no information. This holds whenever the straight line connecting $(0, V(0))$ and $(1, V(1))$ is greater than V near 1.

[20]This can be seen as follows: Proposition 1 implies that for any prior full revelation can only be best or worst when the straight line connecting $(0, V(0))$ and $(1, V(1))$ lies above or below the graph of V for all b. This a global property which is prior-independent.

results.[21] For $b_t > 0$, the fully revealing test is never optimal. For all priors, full revelation is dominated either by no revelation or by partial revelation. With a similar argument, one finds that full revelation is never the worst either. Instead, a partially revealing test turns out as the worst for small priors, and a perfectly non-revealing test is worst for large priors.[22] Thus, under Assumption 1, the premise of the analysis of Eliaz and Spiegler (2006) that full revelation is either best or worst is typically not fulfilled.

5 Biased Perceptions of Probabilities

The previous section showed that the interplay between anticipatory utility and the instrumental value of information can give rise to tests that are more accurate on good than on bad news. This happens whenever Assumption 1 is fulfilled such that the function V is concave up to some point and convex from there on. This section demonstrates that situations where Assumption 1 holds also arise if the patient relies on probability weighting, even if there is no instrumental value of information. Probability weighting, i.e. a biased perception of probabilities, is thus a second, independent argument in favor of the structure of optimal tests identified in Proposition 6.

In the following, let us set the instrumental value of information to zero, i.e., $\theta = 1$. Unlike before, we assume that the patient's anticipatory utility does not depend on the posterior belief B directly, but rather on a weighted version $w(B)$ of that belief. Such probability weighting has been discussed extensively in the behavioral literature, mostly in the context of prospect theory and rank-dependent utility.[23] Following that literature, we assume that the probability weighting function w is an increasing function with $w(0) = 0$ and $w(1) = 1$ so that probabilities of certain events are evaluated correctly. Further, the typical form of w is an inverse S-shape: w grows quickly near 0 and near 1. The patient thus perceives differences between intermediate probabilities, e.g. 40% and 70%, smaller than they really are. To such a patient, a coarse test

[21]Epstein (2008) provides an alternative reconciliation using richer classes of preferences which may depend on the prior in more general ways than under classical, expectation-based anticipatory utility.

[22]The worst possible test can be read off from the smallest convex function below V in an analogous fashion to the optimal test. As seen in Figure 2, this smallest convex function is linear starting in $(0, V(0))$ until some point b_w in the concavity region where it is tangential to V. The worst possible test induces beliefs $b_l = 0$ or $b_h = b_w$ for $p < b_w$ while it is non-revealing for $p > b_w$.

[23]See Wakker (2010), especially Chapter 7, for an introduction.

that involves a clear-cut signal of disease-freeness may be specifically appealing. The chance of learning to be perfectly healthy outshines the potential risk of bad, yet still coarse, news. The following analysis confirms this intuition.

The doctor's test design problem now becomes

$$\max_{B \in \mathcal{B}} E[V(B)] \text{ where } V(b) = U(w(b)). \tag{2}$$

When optimizing over potential tests, the doctor takes an unbiased expectation over the patient's long-term well-being as affected by the respective test results.[24] [25]

As long as the function V is continuous, this problem falls under the analysis of Section 3. Section 5.1 provides conditions under which Section 4 applies as well. Optimal tests sometimes confirm perfect health but only provide coarse bad news. Section 5.2 studies the so-called neo-additive probability weighting function $w(b)$ which has discontinuities at $b = 0$ and $b = 1$, thus incorporating an even sharper distinction between certain and uncertain prospects. While the analysis is technically a bit different, we show that again, the test structure from the previous section remains optimal. Finally, we provide some results that disentangle the influences of "overweighting of small probabilities" and "underweighting of large probabilities" on optimal tests.

5.1 Smooth Probability Weighting

In this section, we assume that the function w is three times continuously differentiable and strictly increasing with $w(0) = 0$ and $w(1) = 1$. Moreover, we assume that there exists $b_c \in (0, 1)$ such that w is strictly concave over $[0, b_c]$ and strictly convex over $[b_c, 1]$. The latter is the assumption of an inverse S-shape which is satisfied by most common smooth probability

[24] A patient will likely have to live many years with a test result, such that biases in risk perception could play important roles for the utility he derives from that result. Studies document that patients tend to estimate health risk from genetic disease with less bias than risk resulting from unhealthy behavior (Weinstein, 1984). This may be driven by an illusion of control rather that by an unrealistic optimism per se (compare McKenna, 1993). Yet also with regard to genetic risk, biases in perception have been documented in patients (e.g. Erblich et al., 2000).

[25] A patient may be in addition short-term biased regarding probabilities of test results. Yet such biases become irrelevant right after the test has been conducted. We therefore assume that the doctor optimizes the patient's welfare taking into account how the patient will feel about the test result in the decades to come but not how the patient may distort the probabilities of test outcomes right before the test is carried out.

weighting function such as those of Tversky and Kahneman (1992) and Prelec (1998) over the commonly studied parameter regions. The following observation is immediate.

Corollary 1. *Suppose that the patient's anticipatory utility is linear in perceived beliefs, i.e., $V(b) = w(b)$. Then V satisfies Assumption 1.*

Thus, even for a patient who is neutral to variations in his biased probabilities, the optimal test is of the form described in Proposition 6 and thus involves coarse signals. This finding is in contrast to the case $V(p) = w(p) = p$ of unbiased perceptions of probabilities where any test is as good as any other since $E[V(B)] = p$ for any admissible B. We next return to the case where the patient is averse to variations in his biased beliefs so that U is concave. Proposition 7 formulates sufficient conditions such that the interplay of U and w induces a function V that is first concave and then convex and thus fulfills again Assumption 1.

Proposition 7. *Suppose U is twice continuously differentiable and DARA, i.e., $-U''(x)/U'(x)$ is decreasing. Denote by $h(y) = w^{-1}(y)$ the inverse of w and assume $-h''(y)/h'(y)$ is strictly increasing with $\lim_{y \uparrow 1} -h''(y)/h'(y) = \infty$. Then, the function $V(b) = U(w(b))$ satisfies Assumption 1.*

Intuitively, what needs to be ensured for the result is that the concavity of U dominates for small b while the convexity of w dominates for large b. The DARA assumption implies that U becomes increasingly less concave. The assumption on $h = w^{-1}$ goes into the opposite direction. Being the inverse of w, h is S-shaped and switches at b_c from convexity to concavity. The "IARA" assumption ensures that this switch is also a local property so that the function first becomes less and less convex and then more and more concave.

We next show that the probability weighting function proposed by Prelec (1998) satisfies the requirements of Proposition 7 over a wide range of parameters.

Proposition 8. *Let*

$$w(b) = \exp(-\kappa(-\log(b))^\rho)$$

where $\rho \in (0, 1)$ and $\kappa < \rho^{-\rho}$. Then for $h(y) = w^{-1}(y)$ we have that $-h''(y)/h'(y)$ is increasing with $\lim_{y \uparrow 1} -h''(y)/h'(y) = \infty$.

$\rho \in (0,1)$ guarantees that w has an inverse S-shape rather than an S-shape. Moreover, as $\rho^{-\rho} > 1$, κ can take any value in $[0,1]$ and even larger values. The result thus covers the one-parameter case of Prelec's probability weighting ($\kappa = 1$) but also many cases with $\kappa > 1$, as long as κ does not become too large. For instance, Wakker (2010) proposes $\rho = 0.65$ and $\kappa = 1.05$ as plausible values. With $\rho = 0.65$, the restriction becomes $\kappa \leq \rho^{-\rho} \approx 1.32$ which clearly includes the case $\kappa = 1.05$.

The probability weighting function due to Tversky and Kahneman (1992)

$$w(b) = \frac{b^\rho}{(b^\rho + (1-b)^\rho)^{\frac{1}{\rho}}}$$

is analytically not as tractable as Prelec's but we can easily verify visually that its curvature satisfies our assumptions for common estimates of the parameter ρ. Here, we make use of the fact that instead of monotonicity of $-h''(y)/h'(y)$ we can equivalently study monotonicity of $w''(b)/(w'(b))^2$ as is shown in the proof of Proposition 7. As seen in Figure 4 in the appendix, the curve $w''(b)/(w'(b))^2$ is increasing and divergent at $b \uparrow 1$ in all cases. The values of ρ between 0.56 and 0.71 are taken from Table 1 of Bleichrodt (2001) who reports estimates from various studies.

5.2 Neo-additive Probability Weighting

Finally, let us consider the case in which probability weighting takes the form of the neo-additive weighting function $w(0) = 0$, $w(1) = 1$ and $w(b) = \rho + b(\kappa - \rho)$ for $0 < \rho < \kappa < 1$ and $b \in (0,1)$. The weight function is thus linear over $(0,1)$ but discounts probabilities which are between zero and one, treating them as if they lay between the values ρ and κ. $\rho > 0$ can thus be interpreted as the perceived likelihood of very unlikely yet still possible outcomes, while κ corresponds to outcomes which are almost certain but not guaranteed. Varying these parameters can give further insight into how the interplay of probability weighting and anticipatory utility works.

To warm up, let us consider the simple case where utility translates directly into weighted beliefs, i.e., $V(b) = w(b)$. As w is no longer continuous, we cannot directly apply our previous results. It turns out that the optimum is no longer characterized by the concave hull of V. In fact, the optimum does not even exist anymore. Yet there are ε-optimal tests. These implement the beliefs $(b_l^\varepsilon, b_h) = (\varepsilon, 1)$. Thus, the patient either learns that he is healthy for certain, or ill with a high probability.

Proposition 9. *Define $\widehat{w}(b) = \rho + b(1-\rho)$ for all $b \in [0,1]$ and consider the case $V(b) = w(b)$. Then, any admissible belief $B \in \mathcal{B}$ satisfies $E[V(B)] \leq \widehat{w}(E[B]) = \widehat{w}(p)$. For $\varepsilon \in (0,p)$, the family of tests inducing the beliefs B^ε which take values $(b_l^\varepsilon, b_h) = (\varepsilon, 1)$ satisfies*

$$\lim_{\varepsilon \downarrow 0} E[V(B^\varepsilon)] = \widehat{w}(p).$$

In this setting, the smallest concave function dominating V is given by $\overline{w}(b) = \widehat{w}(b)$ for $b > 0$ and $\overline{w}(0) = 0$.[26] Arguing as in Section 3 would thus suggest an optimal test which is perfectly revealing. Yet such a test is now dominated by tests which are only almost perfectly revealing. This difference emerges due to the jump of V at zero.[27]

Let us now analyze the more general case where $V(b) = U(w(b))$ for some twice continuously differentiable, increasing, strictly concave function U. The patient thus considers variation in posterior beliefs as undesirable again. The function V jumps from $U(0)$ to $U(\rho)$ at zero and from $U(\kappa)$ to $U(1)$ at one. Over the interval $(0,1)$, V is strictly concave. As depicted in Figure 3, two cases emerge analogously to the two cases in Proposition 5.

(i) Consider the function $\widehat{V}(b) = U(\rho) + b(U(1) - U(\rho))$, the straight line connecting $(0, V(0^+))$ and $(1, V(1))$ where $V(0^+) = U(\rho)$. If $\widehat{V}(b) \geq V(b)$ for all $b \in [0,1]$, then we are essentially back in the setting of Proposition 9. $\widehat{V}(b)$ is identical to the smallest concave function greater than V over $(0,1]$ but does not jump at zero. ε-optimal tests are highly revealing but they avoid a signal no hope.

(ii) If $\widehat{V}(b) \geq V(b)$ is violated for some $b > 0$, then $\overline{V}$, the smallest concave function dominating V, is identical to V up to some point b_t and linear from there on. b_t is the unique point at which the tangent to $V(b)$ passes through $(1, V(1))$, see Lemma 2 below.

[26] A concave function on a closed interval can have jumps on the interval's end points.

[27] In particular, V is no longer upper semi-continuous, a property that guarantees existence of optimal signals, e.g., in Kamenica and Gentzkow (2011).

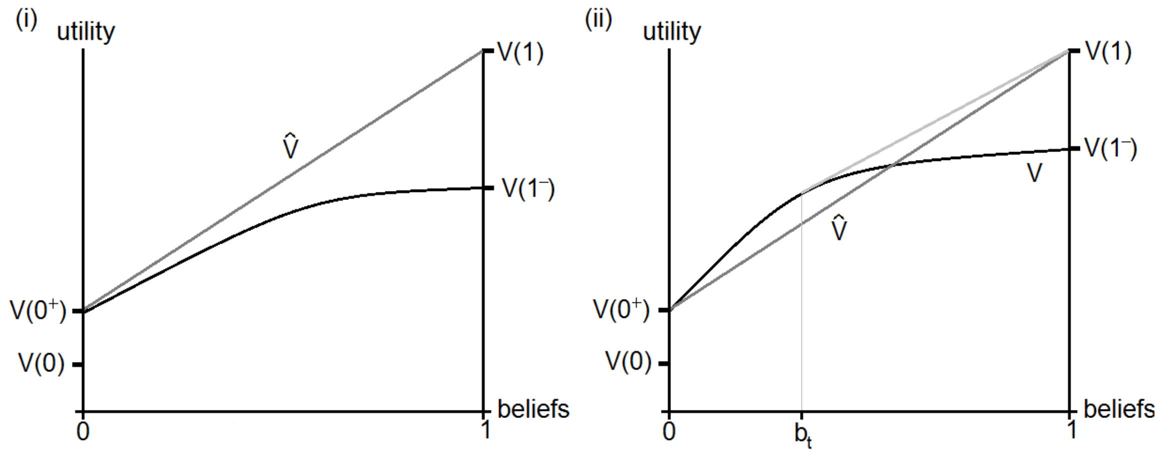

Figure 3: Case (i) on the left and (ii) on the right with V in black and $\widehat{V}$ in gray. In case (ii) the tangent for the construction of b_t is in light gray.

A simple condition determines whether we are in case (i) or case (ii).

Lemma 2. *If*

$$U'(\rho) \cdot (\kappa - \rho) \leq U(1) - U(\rho) \tag{3}$$

holds, we are in case (i), i.e., we have $\widehat{V}(b) = U(\rho) + b(U(1) - U(\rho)) \geq V(b)$ *for all* $b \in [0, 1]$*. When* (3) *is violated, we are in case (ii), i.e., there exists* $b > 0$ *such that* $\widehat{V}(b) > V(b)$ *and a unique point* $b_t \in (0, 1)$ *at which the tangent to* $V(b)$ *passes through* $(1, V(1))$*.*

Condition (3) compares the slope of V in 0^+ to the the slope of $\widehat{V}$. As seen in Figure 3, the interior tangential point b_t cannot exist when the slope of $\widehat{V}$ is globally larger than the slope of V. From (3), we see that it depends on κ whether we are in case (i) or (ii). By the strict concavity of U, it follows that (3) is always satisfied for sufficiently small $\kappa \in (\rho, 1)$, and violated for sufficiently large κ. The case distinction thus depends on how strongly high probabilities are underweighted. When underweighting is strong and κ is small, the jump of V near one dominates the information aversion induced by a concave U. We are thus in case (i) and ε-optimal tests are almost fully revelatory. When κ is sufficiently large, so that underweighting is moderate, we observe an interplay between probability weighting and anticipatory utility, leading to the optimality of partially revealing tests which have the same structure as in Proposition 6.

Proposition 10. *Suppose that* (3) *is violated so that we are in case (ii). The tangential point*

$b_t \in (0,1)$ is characterized by

$$U(1) - U(w(b_t)) = (1-b_t)(\kappa-\rho)U'(w(b_t)). \tag{4}$$

Optimal tests are characterized as in Proposition 6:

(i) If $p \leq b_t$, then the optimal test is perfectly non-revealing.

(ii) If $p > b_t$, then the optimal belief takes only values $b_l = b_t$ and $b_h = 1$.

Thus, if the prior probability of being healthy is too small, the patient avoids further information. When the prior probability is sufficiently large, the patient prefers a test which sometimes reveals perfect health but never the opposite.

We next discuss how this effect depends on ρ and κ, the overweighting of small probabilities of being healthy and the underweighting of larger ones. To this end, we study how the threshold b_t reacts to small changes in ρ and κ. We interpret a decrease in b_t as an increase in the utility from information: A decrease in b_t implies both that the range of priors under which patients benefit from information is greater, and that the optimal test $(b_l, b_h) = (b_t, 1)$ is more dispersed.

Proposition 11. *Suppose that* (3) *is violated and denote by b_t a solution to* (4). *We have $\frac{\mathrm{d}b_t}{\mathrm{d}\rho} < 0$ and*

$$\frac{\mathrm{d}b_t}{\mathrm{d}\kappa} > 0 \quad \Leftrightarrow \quad \left(-\frac{U''(b_t)}{U'(b_t)}\right) b_t(1-b_t)(\kappa-\rho) < 1.$$

In particular, $-\frac{U''(b_t)}{U'(b_t)} < 4$ implies $\frac{\mathrm{d}b_t}{\mathrm{d}\kappa} > 0$.

Thus, an increase in ρ, i.e. a stronger overweighting of small probabilities, always increases the benefit of information. A decrease in κ, i.e. a stronger underweighting of large probabilities, has the same effect if the absolute risk aversion term $-U''/U'$ is not too large. The effect is reversed when U is very concave, corresponding to a strong aversion against information in the absence of probability weighting.

6 Conclusion

Precise tests can be scary. Patients, for example, may shy away from tests that reveal whether they have a hereditary disease anchored in their genes or not, due to anticipatory feelings. We show that if there is an instrumental need for information, such as career or family planning, coarse test structures turn out optimal. Such tests typically avoid providing precise bad news. They give one of two signals – a precise good one, or a coarse bad one. The same test structure turns out optimal if patients rely on prominent forms of probability weighting with regard to their anticipatory well-being.

Creating such binary tests that involve coarse signals is easy. One way is to work with pooled samples. If several blood samples of different patients are mixed and only screened thereafter, the detection of a marker of disease does not imply that all people in the sample are concerned, but only that one certainly is. Testing pooled samples has been frequently used in other contexts. For example, in order to ensure safety of blood transmission while keeping costs manageable, pooled samples of donated blood are screened for infectious diseases, compare e.g. Stramer, Caglioti and Strong (2002). Another option is to work with computerized methods that involve randomization in the communication between the doctor and the laboratory.

Our paper does not suggest to give up perfectly revelatory testing. Rather, it argues that in many situations, providing a menu of tests including the precise test but also coarse ones, would be good. This way, patients can choose an information structure depending on their needs and feelings. So far, if patients are too scared to take the precise test, they are just left with the option to walk away and learn nothing.

With regard to Huntington's disease, some may think of more conventional economic explanations for avoiding the precise test. One may argue that conducting the test is costly, or worry that finding a health insurer becomes impossible if the test result is bad.[28] But neither of these explanations can fully capture what is going on. To see this, recall the thought experiment from the introduction about a reliable test which told you whether you would live for another t years. The test in the thought experiment is costless. Assume the test predicted only relatively early, sudden deaths. Then, finding a health insurer becomes easy in case of a bad test result. Still it remains difficult to decide whether to take the test or not.

[28]Whether this is the case depends on the country. Germany, for example, does not allow health insurers to discriminate based on genetic test results. For the relevant legal guidelines, see Gendiagnostikgesetz §18.

A Proofs

Proof of Lemma 1. Fix $a, b, \rho \in [0,1]$ and define $m = \rho a + (1-\rho)b$. Then by the optimality of y^*, we have concavity:

$$\begin{aligned}
& c^*(\rho a + (1-\rho)b) \\
= \; & (\rho a + (1-\rho)b)C(1, y^*(m)) + (1 - (\rho a + (1-\rho)b))C(0, y^*(m)) \\
= \; & \rho c(a, y^*(m)) + (1-\rho)c(b, y^*(m)) \\
\geq \; & \rho c(a, y^*(a)) + (1-\rho)c(b, y^*(b)) \\
= \; & \rho c^*(a) + (1-\rho)c^*(b).
\end{aligned}$$

Concavity over $[0,1]$ implies continuity over $(0,1)$. Continuity in 0 follows from $c^*(0) = c(0,0) = 0$, and from the facts that $0 \leq c^*(b) \leq c(b,0)$ and

$$\lim_{b \to 0} c(b,0) = \lim_{b \to 0} (1-b)C(0,0) + bC(1,0) = 0.$$

Continuity in 1 follows analogously. □

Proof of Proposition 1. We first show that $E[V(B)] \leq \overline{V}(p)$ for all $B \in \mathcal{B}$ and then construct B^* such that it attains this upper bound. For the upper bound fix some $B \in \mathcal{B}$ and observe that since $\overline{V}$ is weakly greater than V and concave we obtain

$$E\left[V(B)\right] \leq E\left[\overline{V}(B)\right] \leq \overline{V}(E[B]) = \overline{V}(p)$$

by Jensen's inequality. Therefore, we can at most achieve $\overline{V}$ evaluated at the prior belief p. Thus, $B^* = p$ is optimal whenever $V(p) = \overline{V}(p)$. To see that we can always achieve $\overline{V}(p)$ we construct a random variable B^* with

$$E[V(B^*)] = \overline{V}(p)$$

for the other case where $V(p) < \overline{V}(p)$. Note that by its minimality, $\overline{V}$ is linear on all open intervals J with $V(b) < \overline{V}(b)$ for all $b \in J$. Denote by $I = (b_l, b_h)$ the largest interval with the properties that $p \in I$ and $V(b) < \overline{V}(b)$ for all $b \in I$. Since this is the maximal interval, V and $\overline{V}$ must coincide in b_l and in b_h.[29] Now choose B^* as the unique random variable which takes only values b_l and b_h and which has expected value p. B^* is given explicitly in the proposition. Since V and $\overline{V}$ agree on the two values of B^* and by the linearity of $\overline{V}$ on I, we have

$$E[V(B^*)] = E[\overline{V}(B^*)] = \overline{V}(E[B^*]) = \overline{V}(p)$$

and thus B^* indeed attains the upper bound. □

Proof of Proposition 2. Applying Bayes' rule, we immediately obtain the requirements

$$P[X = 1|S = \text{“Good”}] = \frac{\alpha p}{\alpha p + \beta(1-p)} \stackrel{!}{=} b_h$$

and

$$P[X = 1|S = \text{“Bad”}] = \frac{(1-\alpha)p}{(1-\alpha)p + (1-\beta)(1-p)} \stackrel{!}{=} b_l.$$

Solving for α and β yields the solution given in the proposition. It remains to check that $\alpha, \beta \in [0,1]$. For β this is clear since it is the product of two fractions which obviously lie in $[0,1]$ by $0 \leq b_l < p < b_h \leq 1$. $\alpha \geq 0$ also follows immediately. $\alpha \leq 1$ is a consequence of the fact that

$$\frac{p - b_l}{b_h - b_l} \leq \frac{p}{b_h}.$$

□

Proof of Proposition 3. Since the optimal test is invariant to multiplying V by a constant, we can reinterpret decreasing θ as adding a convex function to V. Recalling the definition of b_l and b_h as the boundaries of maximal intervals over which $\overline{V}$ strictly dominates V, the result follows from the following claim: Let f be a convex function and denote by $\overline{V+f}$ the smallest concave function greater than $V+f$. Then, if $\overline{V}$ is strictly greater than V on an open interval I, $\overline{V+f}$ is strictly greater than $V+f$ over I as well. The main step in proving the claim consists of

[29] In particular, for the case of $I = (0,1)$ where this does not immediately follow from the definition of I, it is easy to check that by the minimality of $\overline{V}$, V and $\overline{V}$ *always* coincide in 0 and 1: Otherwise we could modify $\overline{V}$ on a small interval to make it smaller.

proving the inequality

$$\overline{V}(b) + f(b) \leq \overline{V + f}(b) \tag{5}$$

for all $b \in [0,1]$. To see this inequality, fix some $q \in [0,1]$, denote by $\mathcal{B}_q$ the random variables on $[0,1]$ with mean q and denote by B_V^* a solution to $\max_{B \in \mathcal{B}_q} E[V(B)]$. Then by Proposition 1 and the convexity of f we conclude

$$\begin{aligned}
\overline{V}(q) + f(q) &= \max_{B \in \mathcal{B}_q} E[V(B)] + \min_{B \in \mathcal{B}_q} E[f(B)] \\
&\leq V(B_V^*) + f(B_V^*) \\
&\leq \max_{B \in \mathcal{B}_q} V(B) + f(B) \\
&= \overline{V + f}(q)
\end{aligned}$$

which proves (5). The claim now follows from (5) via

$$V(b) < \overline{V}(b) \quad \Rightarrow \quad V(b) + f(b) < \overline{V}(b) + f(b) \leq \overline{V + f}(b).$$

$\square$

Proof of Proposition 4. For fixed d_l the constrained optimal test can be constructed as follows: For $d \in (p,1]$, define g_d as the straight line connecting $(d_l, V(d_l))$ and $(d, V(d))$. For all d_h, we have $E[V(D(d_l,d_h))] = g_{d_h}(p)$ and by assumption there exists d_h such that $g_{d_h}(p) > V(p)$. Let g be the straight line through $(d_l, V(d_l))$ with the property that g has the smallest slope among all straight lines which are weakly greater than V over $[p,1]$. Clearly, $g(p) \geq E[V(D(d_l,d_h))]$ for all $d_h \in (p,1]$. Moreover, by the continuity of V this inequality is an equality for some values of d_h and, accordingly, $g \equiv g_{d_h}$ for these values. Denote by d_h^* the smallest value in $[p,1]$ such that $g_{d_h^*} \equiv g$. By assumption, $d_h^* > p$. Thus we have identified a constrained optimal belief $D(d_l, d_h^*)$ and it remains to show that $d_h^* \leq b_h$. Note first that $g_{b_h}(b) \leq g_{d_h^*}(b)$ for all $b > d_l$ by the definition of d_h^*. Denote by f the straight line connecting $(b_l, V(b_l))$ and $(b_h, V(b_h))$ and note that $f(b) = \overline{V}(b)$ for $b \in [b_l, b_h]$ and $f(b) \geq \overline{V}(b)$ for $b \geq b_h$ by the concavity of $\overline{V}$. Since $f(d_l) = \overline{V}(d_l) > V(d_l) = g_{b_h}(d_l)$ and $f(b_h) = V(b_h) = g_{b_h}(b_h)$, it follows that $g_{b_h}(b) > f(b)$ for

$b > b_h$ as both functions are linear. Yet this implies that for $b > b_h$

$$g_{d_h^*}(b) > g_{b_h}(b) > f(b) \geq \overline{V}(b) \geq V(b).$$

Since $g_{d_h^*}(d_h^*) = V(d_h^*)$ we must have $d_h^* \leq b_h$. $\square$

Proof of Example 1. We have to show that the second derivative $V''(b) = \theta U''(b) - (1-\theta)c^{*\prime\prime}(b)$ switches signs at most once and if it does then from negative to positive. Under our assumption on $C(x, \cdot)$, the function $c^*(b)$ is given by $c^*(b) = b(1-b)$ and thus $c^{*\prime\prime}(b) = -2$ for all b. Since U'' is monotone, $\theta U''(b)$ and $(1-\theta)c^{*\prime\prime}(b)$ intersect at most once and it is easily checked that the resulting signs of V'' match the claims in the lemma. $\square$

Proof of Proposition 5. The proof proceeds in two steps: In the first step we show that the construction of $\overline{V}$ in the statement of the proposition is always valid, i.e., that there exists a unique function which can be constructed according to the prescriptions in the proposition. Denote the constructed function by $\widehat{V}$. In the second step we verify that $\widehat{V} = \overline{V}$, i.e., that the constructed function is indeed the smallest concave function dominating V.

Step 1 : The construction of $\overline{V}$ given in the proposition is satisfied by a unique function $\widehat{V}$. Case (i) is clear so we turn to case (ii). Note that since V is a continuous function on a compact set (and thus bounded) and since its derivative in $b = 1$ must be bounded from below by strict convexity near 1, we can choose real numbers $z_l < z_h$ with the following properties: $g_{z_h}(b) > V(b)$ for all $b < 1$ and $g_{z_l}(b) < V(b)$ for some $b \in [0, 1]$. Define the compact set $Z = [z_l, z_h]$ and define z^* via

$$z^* = \inf\{z \in Z | g_z(b) > V(b) \; \forall b \in [0, 1)\}.$$

By the continuity of V and our choice of Z this infimum is actually attained. Since we are in case (ii) we also know that $z^* > V(0)$ since g_z is monotonic in z. Since g_{z^*} is defined as an infimum over all g_z which are greater than V and since g_z is continuous in z it follows that there must exist some $b_t \in (0, 1)$ for which $g_{z^*}(b_t) = V(b_t)$. Here we can exclude $b_t = 0$ since $z^* > V(0)$. g_{z^*} and V cannot cross at this intersection because otherwise we could increase z^* slightly and still have an intersection, contradicting the minimality of z^*. Thus, g_{z^*} and V must have the same slope in b_t, i.e. g_{z^*} is a tangent to V in b_t. Moreover, we must have $b_t < b_c$: Since V and g_{z^*} coincide in b_t and in 1, they must have the same average slope over the interval $[b_t, 1]$. This average slope equals their common slope in b_t where they are tangential since g_{z^*} has constant slope. This would immediately give a contradiction if we had $b_t \geq b_c$ since in that case V would be strictly convex (strictly increasing slope) over $[b_t, 1]$. The uniqueness of b_t follows from the strict concavity of V over $[0, b_c]$: A strictly concave function cannot be tangential from below to the same straight line at more than one point. Thus, we can always construct the function $\widehat{V}$ described in the proposition. The resulting function is indeed concave since it equals V on $[0, b_t] \subset [0, b_c]$ and then continues with constant slope. Moreover, by the definition of z^*, we have $\widehat{V}(b) \geq V(b)$ for all $b > b_t$.

Step 2 : $\widehat{V}$ from Step 1 is indeed the smallest concave function dominating V, $\widehat{V} \equiv \overline{V}$.

Recall that the minimum of two concave functions is again concave. Thus we must have $V(b) \leq \overline{V}(b) \leq \widehat{V}(b)$ for all $b \in [0, 1]$: If the second inequality was violated at some b then $\min(\overline{V}, \widehat{V})$ would be a concave function dominating V which was strictly smaller than $\overline{V}$ at some b, contradicting the minimality of $\overline{V}$. Since V and $\widehat{V}$ coincide on $[0, b_t]$ and in 1, they must thus also coincide with $\overline{V}$ at these values. Yet on the remaining values $(b_t, 1)$, $\widehat{V}$ is linear and thus no concave function which agrees with $\widehat{V}$ at the end points $\{b_t, 1\}$ can be smaller. This proves $\overline{V}(b) = \widehat{V}(b)$ for all $b \in [0, 1]$. □

Proof of Proposition 6. For $p \leq b_t$ we have $V(p) = \overline{V}(p)$ by Proposition 5 and thus the optimal test is non-revealing by Proposition 1. By Proposition 5, we also know that $\overline{V}$ is linear over $[b_t, 1]$. Thus, for $p > b_t$, a test which induces beliefs b_t or 1 attains $\overline{V}(p)$. By Proposition 1, it is thus an optimal test. □

Proof of Proposition 7. We have to show that

$$V''(b) = u''(w(b))w'(b)^2 + u'(b)w''(b)$$

has exactly one interior zero and is negative to its left and positive to its right. Writing $V''(b) = 0$

as

$$-\frac{u''(w(b))}{u'(w(b)} = \frac{w''(b)}{(w'(b))^2},$$

we notice that the left hand side is positive and decreasing. Furthermore, the right hand side is continuous and positive from some interior point on. It remains to show that our assumptions on $h(y) = w^{-1}(y)$ imply that $w''(b)/(w'(b))^2$ is increasing and diverges to $+\infty$ for $b \uparrow 1$. To see this, we differentiate the identity $w(h(y)) = y$ twice, to obtain $w'(h(y))h'(y) = 1$ and

$$w''(h(y))(h'(y))^2 + w'(h(y))h''(y)) = 0.$$

Using these two identities, we find that

$$\frac{w''(h(y)}{w'(h(y))^2} = -\frac{h''(y)}{h'(y)}$$

which, by strict monotonicity of h, completes the argument as $w''/(w')^2$ and $-h''/h'$ are identical up to a monotonic transformation. $\square$

Proof of Proposition 7. The inverse h of w is given by

$$h(y) = \exp(-\lambda(-\log(y))^\gamma)$$

where $\gamma = \frac{1}{\rho} > 1$ and $\lambda = \kappa^{-\frac{1}{\rho}}$. The condition $\kappa < \rho^{-\rho}$ becomes $\lambda\gamma > 1$. The first two derivatives of h are given by

$$h'(y) = h(y)\frac{\gamma\lambda}{y}(-\log(y))^{\gamma-1}$$

and

$$h''(y) = -h'(y)\left(\frac{\gamma-1}{y(-\log(y))} - \frac{\gamma\lambda(-\log(y))^{\gamma-1}}{y} + \frac{1}{y}\right)$$

so that the expression in brackets corresponds to $r(y) = -h''(y)/h'(y)$. As $y \uparrow 1$, the summand $(\gamma-1)/(y(-\log(y)))$ converges to $+\infty$ while the other summands in r remain bounded. Thus, $r(y) \to +\infty$ for $y \uparrow 1$ as claimed. It remains to show that r' is positive. Taking derivatives and simplifying, we see that r' can be written as

$$r'(y) = \frac{G(-\log(y))}{y\log(y)^2}$$

where

$$G(z) = (\gamma - 1)(1 + \gamma\lambda z^\gamma - z) + z \cdot (\gamma\lambda z^\gamma - z).$$

We thus have to show that $G(z) > 0$ for all $z \geq 0$, i.e., over the whole range of $-\log(y)$. Defining

$$g(z) = (\gamma - 1)(1 + z^\gamma - z) + z \cdot (z^\gamma - z) \geq 0,$$

it follows from $\gamma\lambda > 1$ that $G(z) > g(z)$ so that it suffices to show $g(z) \geq 0$. For $z \geq 1$, we have $z^\gamma \geq z$ which implies $g(z) \geq 0$. For the case $z \leq 1$, notice first that the function $f(z) = z^\gamma - z$ is convex and has its unique minimum at $z^* = \gamma^{-\frac{1}{\gamma}}$ where it takes the value

$$f(z^*) = -\gamma^{-\frac{\gamma}{\gamma-1}}(\gamma - 1).$$

We thus obtain the bound

$$g(z) \geq (\gamma - 1)(1 + f(z^*)) + z \cdot f(z^*).$$

Using that $f(z^*)$ is negative, we find that this bound implies $g(z) \geq 0$ whenever

$$z \leq -(\gamma - 1)\left(1 + \frac{1}{f(z^*)}\right) = 1 + \gamma^{\frac{\gamma}{\gamma-1}} - \gamma.$$

As $\gamma > 1$ implies $\gamma^{\frac{\gamma}{\gamma-1}} \geq \gamma$, we have thus shown $g(z) \geq 0$ for $z \leq 1$ as well. □

Proof of Proposition 9. We have $V(b) = w(b) \leq \widehat{w}(b)$ for all $b \in [0, 1]$. As $\widehat{w}(b)$ is linear in b, we obtain for all $B \in \mathcal{B}$ the upper bound

$$E[V(B)] \leq E[\widehat{w}(B)] = \widehat{w}(E[B]) = \widehat{w}(p) = \rho + p(1 - \rho). \tag{6}$$

As B^ε has mean p, it must take the values ε and 1 with respective probabilities $\frac{1-p}{1-\varepsilon}$ and $\frac{p-\varepsilon}{1-\varepsilon}$.

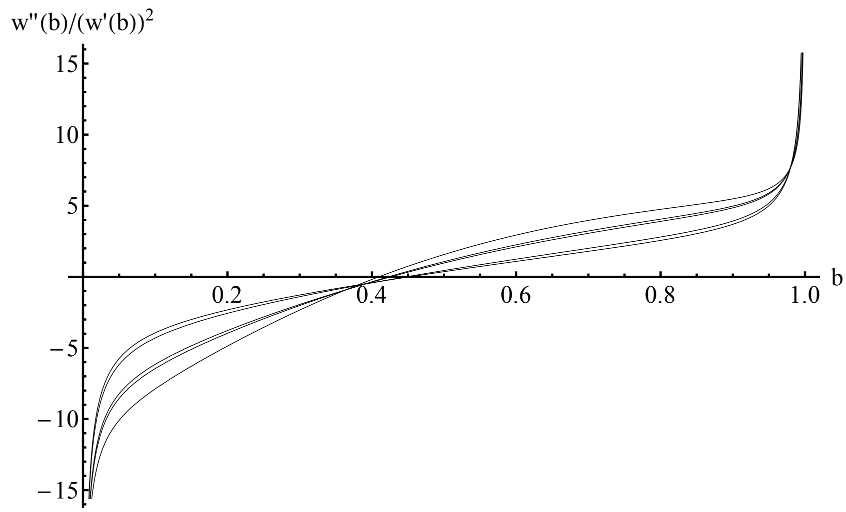

Figure 4: Graph of $w''/(w')^2$ for w of Tversky-Kahneman type, depicted for $\rho \in \{0.56, 0.6, 0.61, 0.69, 0.71\}$. The ordering corresponds to the one from top to bottom at $b = 0.8$.

It follows that

$$E[V(B^\varepsilon)] = E[\widehat{w}(B^\varepsilon)] = \frac{1-p}{1-\varepsilon}(\rho + \varepsilon(1-\rho)) + \frac{p-\varepsilon}{1-\varepsilon}.$$

In the limit $\varepsilon \downarrow 0$, $E[V(B^\varepsilon)]$ thus converges to $(1-p)\rho + p = \rho + p(1-\rho)$ which is best-possible by (6). $\square$

Proof of Lemma 2. At the corners $b \in \{0,1\}$ we always have $\hat{V}(b) \geq V(b)$. We can thus replace V by the function $V_0(b) = U(\rho + b(\kappa - \rho))$ which is smooth and concave and which coincides with V over $(0,1)$. Consider now the case where (3) holds. (3) is equivalent to $V_0'(0) \leq \widehat{V}'(0)$. By the concavity of V_0, it thus follows for all $b \in (0,1)$ that

$$V(b) = V_0(b) \leq V_0(0) + V_0'(0)b \leq \widehat{V}(0) + \widehat{V}'(0)b = \widehat{V}(b)$$

where we used that $\widehat{V}$ is linear with $\widehat{V}(0)$. (3) thus implies case (i). When (3) is violated, it follows from $V_0(0) = \widehat{V}(0)$ and $V_0'(0) > \widehat{V}'(0)$ that $V(b) = V_0(b) > \widehat{V}(b)$ for sufficiently small positive b. We are thus in case (ii). It remains to show existence of the tangential point b_t in case (ii). $\hat{V}$ and V_0 are both increasing where $\hat{V}$ is linear and V_0 is strictly concave. They thus intersect at most twice. One intersection is at $V_0(0) = \widehat{V}(0)$. There must exist a second intersection $b_c \in (0,1)$ as we have $V_0(b) > \widehat{V}(b)$ but $V_0(1) = U(\kappa) < U(1) = \widehat{V}(b)$. Now consider the function $\widetilde{V}(b) = \max(V_0(b), \widehat{V}(b))$. $\widetilde{V}$ is concave and identical to V over $(0, b_c]$ and convex (linear) over $[b_c, 1]$. We can thus argue as in Section 4 that there exists a unique $b_t \in (0, b_c)$ such that the straight line connecting $(b_t, V(b_t))$ and $(1, V(1))$ is tangential to V. □

Proof of Proposition 10. In light of Lemma 2, we only have to prove the characterization of b_t. After that, the remainder of the argument is analogous to the one for Proposition 6. A tangent to V at a point b_t has slope $V'(b_t)$. By construction, the tangent at b_t is identical to V at $b = 1$, i.e.,

$$V(b_t) + V'(b_t)(1 - b_t) = V(1).$$

Plugging in $V'(b_t) = (\kappa - \rho)U'(w(b_t))$, $V(b_t) = U(w(b_t))$ and $V(1) = U(1)$ and rearranging yields (4). □

Proof of Proposition 11. By (4), we know that b_t is characterized by the condition $H(b_t, \kappa, \rho) = 0$ with

$$H(b_t, \kappa, \rho) = U(1) - U(\rho + b_t(\kappa - \rho)) - (1 - b_t)(\kappa - \rho)U'(\rho + b_t(\kappa - \rho)).$$

The derivatives of H with respect to b_t and ρ are given by

$$\frac{\partial H(b_t, \kappa, \rho)}{\partial \rho} = -(1 - b_t)^2(\kappa - \rho)U''(\rho + b_t(\kappa - \rho)) > 0$$

and

$$\frac{\partial H(b_t, \kappa, \rho)}{\partial b_t} = -(1 - b_t)(\kappa - \rho)^2 U''(\rho + b_t(\kappa - \rho)) > 0$$

where the signs follows from $\kappa > \rho$, $b_t < 1$ and the concavity of U. By the implicit function theorem, it follows that $\frac{\mathrm{d}b_t}{\mathrm{d}\rho} < 0$. The derivative of H with respect to κ is

$$\frac{\partial H(b_t, \kappa, \rho)}{\partial \kappa} = -U'(\rho + b_t(\kappa - \rho)) - b_t(1 - b_t)(\kappa - \rho)U''(\rho + b_t(\kappa - \rho)).$$

Rearranging leads to the equivalent condition for $\frac{\partial H(b_t, \kappa, \rho)}{\partial \kappa} < 0$ and thus $\frac{\mathrm{d}b_t}{\mathrm{d}\kappa} > 0$. The simplified sufficient condition for $\frac{\mathrm{d}b_t}{\mathrm{d}\kappa} > 0$ follows from $b_t(1 - b_t) \leq \frac{1}{4}$ and $\kappa - \rho < 1$. □

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