

Historical background of Rationality:

Decision-making insights during the Enlightenment.

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Abstract.

It has been necessary to trace some of the roots of the concepts of decision-making, such as rationality in economics, because those have been affected by many influences along the course of the history, due particularly to the development of philosophy. The critique of Sen (2002), among others, to the traditional economic theory and its narrow view of the economic agent, has been reviving the understanding of authors, like Smith in his original context, and their understanding about how decisions are made. Previous to scientific research in economics, those postulates suffered the struggle between philosophy, ethics and religion. The schisms in Occidental religion in the first millennium played a role in the way that not only religion, but science and philosophy developed later. That secularization derived alternative explanations for the concept of the self and its motivations for its actions, using mostly the Greek tradition. With this background, the study of logic was conducted as an important part of the research agenda, mainly by two sides: British Empiricism and Continental Rationalism, both known as the period of the Enlightenment. I argue that the former was responsible for the 'ethically' selfish and 'empirical' agent, while the latter for the 'logical' and 'reasonable' agent. Important philosophers, like Descartes or Hume, privileged the use of mathematical sciences to express this process more accurately. The Cartesian method is the root (and the source of "indubitable certainty") of the developing of mathematical representations of rationality, like maximizing behavior or the internal consistency of choice. All of this will help us to explain the modern linguistic concept of rationality, which nowadays has many focuses.

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Sen, Amartya K.. (2002). 'Rationality and Freedom'. The Belknap Press of
Harvard University Press.