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EDITED BY
JOHN EATWELL
MURRAY MILGATE
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One-line cross-references are shown in italics

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Kuczynski, Jurgen Peter (born 1904)

Kuh, Edwin (1925-1986) Kuhn-Tucker theory

Kuznets, Simon (1901-1985)

Kuznets swings labour, abstract

labour contracts labour economics

labour exchange

labour-managed economies

labour market discrimination

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Q

qualitative economics. Qualitative economics comprises the analysis of economic systems for which qualitative information is available, that is, information about the direction of change (+,-,0) of the values of the functional relations defining the system with respect to changes in the values of its variables. A distinction can be drawn between purely qualitative systems, namely, systems in which the only information available is such sign information, and mixed quantitative-qualitative systems which have quantitative information available as well.

Two classes of economic models have been the subject for most of the work done in qualitative economics: comparative statics models of the form Ax = b, and linear dynamic models of the form x = Ax, where A is an $n \times n$ matrix, and x and b are $n \times 1$ vectors. In the comparative statics models, the problem is to sign (+, -, 0) the elements of the vector x, given information about the sign pattern of the matrix A and of the vector b. In the dynamic models, the problem is that of determining when there is asymptotic stability

$$\left(\lim_{t\to\infty}x(t)=0\right),\,$$

given information about the sign pattern of the matrix A.

Rather complete results are known in the case of purely qualitative systems, while there are a number of special results for mixed systems. Literature surveys covering the former appear in Maybee and Quirk (1969), Allingham and Morishima (1973), and Maybee (1981), while Quirk (1981) presents a summary of stability results for both pure and mixed systems.

Qualitative hypotheses have been a part of economics from the earliest days of formal economic analysis, but it was only in the late 1930s that the first attempts were made to formalize the analysis of qualitative information in economic models, beginning with Hicks's (1939) model of general equilibrium of a competitive economy. In Foundations of Economic Analysis, Samuelson (1947) identified qualitative information, the maximization hypothesis, and the hypothesis of stability of equilibrium as the three fundamental sources of comparative statics theorems in neoclassical economics. Metzler (1945), Mosak (1944), and Morishima (1952) made basic contributions to the analysis of the comparative statics properties of the Hicksian model, and Arrow, Block and Hurwicz (1958, 1959) and McKenzie (1960) provided proofs of stability of the Hicksian model under the gross substitute case, a mixed quantitative-qualitative system.

In the Foundations, Samuelson suggested an elimination approach to analysing qualitative solvability, but the first formal work on the comparative statics properties of purely qualitative systems was due to Lancaster (1962, 1964, 1965), whose approach was generalized by Gorman (1964). The Gorman approach to the qualitative solvability problem is an sterative one, involving a nesting procedure whereby at any stage in the analysis the set of variables is partitioned into two disjoint non-empty sets. For the functional relation associated with that stage, the direction of change of its value with

respect to the variables is weakly the same for all variables in a given set, and opposite to that for the variables in the other set. There is qualitative solvability if and only if this nested partitioning can be continued, exhausting all functional relations, until one element sets are reached.

Taking a different approach, Bassett, Maybee and Quirk (BMQ) (1968) provided the first proof of necessary and sufficient conditions for qualitative solvability of the comparative statics system Ax = b. The BMQ conditions use the notions of cycles and chains in matrices. A chain of length m from i to j ($i \neq j$) in an $n \times n$ matrix A is a product of m elements of A, with the first term in the chain having a row index i and the last term a column index j, with the row index of any term in the product the same as the column index in the preceding term in the product, and with all row indices differing from one another. A cycle (of length m+1) is obtained by multiplying such a chain by the element a_{ij} .

The system Ax = b is said to be qualitatively solvable if, given information as to the signs (+, -, 0) of the elements of A and b, one can solve for a unique sign pattern for the vector x. In analysing such a system, admissible qualitative operations are restricted to renumbering individual equations and/or variables, and multiplying individual equations and/or variables, and multiplying individual equations and/or variables by -1. The BMQ conditions state that Ax = b is qualitatively solvable if and only if by admissible qualitative operations the system can be put into the form Cy = d, where all diagonal elements in C are negative and all cycles in C are non-positive, while all the elements in d are non-negative. If the jth element in d is strictly positive, then all chains in C terminating in j must be non-negative. The solution vector y then has all elements non-positive.

Work on qualitative solvability in more recent years has been concerned primarily with the construction of efficient algorithms for testing for qualitative solvability (see Greenberg and Maybee, 1981; Lady, 1983; Ritschard, 1983), much of this utilizing the tools of graph theory. In addition some work has been done on the problem of partial qualitative solvability, that is, solving for the signs of one or more components of the vector x given sign information as to A and b. The problem of partial qualitative solvability has been resolved for the case where A is qualitatively non-singular but the problem has not been solved in general (see Quirk, 1972; Maybee, 1981; Lady, 1983).

In the purely qualitative case, analysis of the stability properties of the system $\dot{x} = Ax$ has been concerned with the derivation of conditions such that the matrix A can be judged a stable matrix (i.e. the real parts of its characteristic roots are all negative), simply from information as to the sign pattern of A. When every matrix with the same sign pattern as A is a stable matrix, then A is said to be a sign stable matrix, and the dynamic system $\dot{x} = Bx$ is asymptotically stable for any matrix B with the same sign pattern as A. In Quirk and Ruppert (QR) (1965), necessary and sufficient conditions for A to be a sign stable matrix were derived for the case where all the diagonal elements of A are negative. In this case, sign stability occurs if