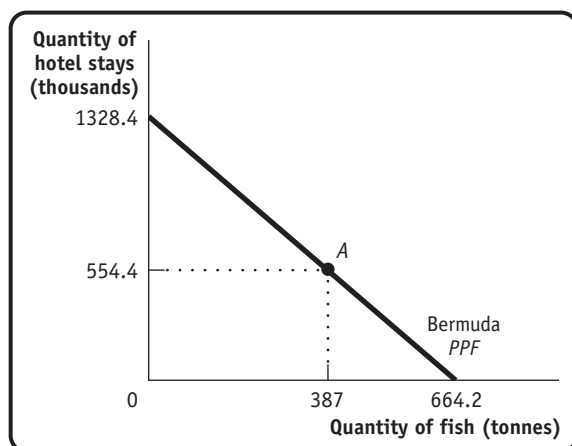


Economic Models: Trade-offs and Trade

1. Two important industries on the island of Bermuda are fishing and tourism. According to data from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Bermuda Department of Statistics, in the year 2009 the 306 registered fishers in Bermuda caught 387 tonnes of marine fish. And the 2719 people employed by hotels produced 554 400 hotel stays (measured by the number of visitor arrivals). Suppose that this production point is efficient in production. Assume also that the opportunity cost of 1 additional tonne of fish is 2000 hotel stays and that this opportunity cost is constant (the opportunity cost does not change).
 - a. If all 306 registered fishers were to be employed by hotels (in addition to the 2719 people already working in hotels), how many hotel stays could Bermuda produce?
 - b. If all 2719 hotel employees were to become fishers (in addition to the 306 fishers already working in the fishing industry), how many tonnes of fish could Bermuda produce?
 - c. Draw a production possibility frontier for Bermuda, with fish on the horizontal axis and hotel stays on the vertical axis, and label Bermuda's actual production point for the year 2009.

Solution

1. a. Forgoing the production of 1 tonne of fish allows Bermuda to produce 2000 additional hotel stays. Therefore, forgoing the production of 387 tonnes of fish allows Bermuda to produce $2000 \times 387 = 774\,000$ additional hotel stays. If all fishers worked in the hotel industry, Bermuda could produce $554\,000 + 774\,000 = 1\,328\,400$ hotel stays.
- b. Forgoing the production of 2000 hotel stays allows Bermuda to produce 1 additional tonne of fish, so giving up 554 400 hotel stays allows Bermuda to produce $554\,400 / 2000 = 277.2$ additional tonnes of fish. If all hotel employees worked in the fishing industry, Bermuda could produce $387 + 277.2 = 664.2$ tonnes of fish.
- c. The accompanying diagram shows the production possibility frontier for Bermuda. Note that it is a straight line because the opportunity cost is constant. Point A is Bermuda's actual production point.



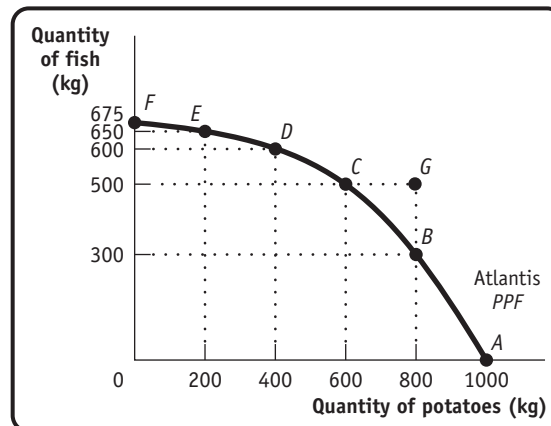
2. Atlantis is a small, isolated island in the South Atlantic. The inhabitants grow potatoes and catch fish. The accompanying table shows the maximum annual output combinations of potatoes and fish that can be produced. Obviously, given their limited resources and available technology, as they use more of their resources for potato production, there are fewer resources available for catching fish.

Maximum annual output options	Quantity of potatoes (kilograms)	Quantity of fish (kilograms)
A	1000	0
B	800	300
C	600	500
D	400	600
E	200	650
F	0	675

- Draw a production possibility frontier with potatoes on the horizontal axis and fish on the vertical axis illustrating these options, showing points A-F.
- Can Atlantis produce 500 kg of fish and 800 kg of potatoes? Explain. Where would this point lie relative to the production possibility frontier?
- What is the opportunity cost of increasing the annual output of potatoes from 600 to 800 kg?
- What is the opportunity cost of increasing the annual output of potatoes from 200 to 400 kg?
- Can you explain why the answers to parts (c) and (d) are not the same? What does this imply about the slope of the production possibility frontier?

Solution

2. a. The accompanying diagram shows the production possibility frontier for Atlantis.



- No, Atlantis cannot produce 500 kg of fish and 800 kg of potatoes. If it produces 500 kg of fish, the most potatoes it can produce is 600 kg. This point would lie outside the production possibility frontier, at point G on the diagram.
- The opportunity cost of increasing output from 600 to 800 kg of potatoes is 200 kg of fish. If Atlantis increases output from 600 to 800 kg of potatoes, it has to cut fish production from 500 kg to 300 kg, that is, by 200 kg.

- d. The opportunity cost of increasing output from 200 to 400 kg of potatoes is 50 kg of fish. If Atlantis increases output from 200 to 400 kg of potatoes, it has to cut fish production from 650 kg to 600 kg, that is, by 50 kg.
 - e. The answers to parts (c) and (d) imply that the more potatoes Atlantis produces, the higher the opportunity cost becomes. For instance, as you grow more and more potatoes, you have to use less and less suitable land to do so. As a result, you have to divert increasingly more resources away from fishing as you grow more potatoes, meaning that you can produce increasingly less fish. This implies, of course, that the production possibility frontier becomes steeper the farther you move along it to the right; that is, the production possibility frontier is bowed out. (Mathematicians call this shape *concave*.)
3. According to Statistics Canada, 11.0 million hectares of land in Canada were used for wheat or corn farming in 2012. Of those 11.0 million hectares, farmers used 9.6 million hectares to grow 999.62 million bushels of wheat and 1.4 million hectares of land to grow 514.15 million bushels of corn. Suppose that Canada's wheat farming and corn farming are efficient in production. At that production point, the opportunity cost of producing 1 additional bushel of wheat is 1.7 fewer bushels of corn. However, because farmers have increasing opportunity costs at higher levels of wheat production, additional bushels of wheat have an opportunity cost greater than 1.7 bushels of corn. For each of the following production points, decide whether that production point is (i) feasible and efficient in production, (ii) feasible but not efficient in production, (iii) not feasible, or (iv) unclear as to whether or not it is feasible.
- a. Farmers use 1.6 million hectares of land to produce 180 million bushels of wheat, and they use 2.4 million hectares of land to produce 900 million bushels of corn. The remaining 7.0 million hectares are left unused.
 - b. From their original production point, farmers transfer 1.6 million hectares of land from corn to wheat production. They now produce 1009.62 million of bushels of wheat and 497.15 million bushels of corn.
 - c. Farmers reduce their production of wheat to 950 million bushels and increase their production of corn to 588.58 million bushels. Along the production possibility frontier, the opportunity cost of going from 514.15 million bushels of corn to 588.58 million bushels of corn is 0.666 bushels of wheat per bushel of corn.

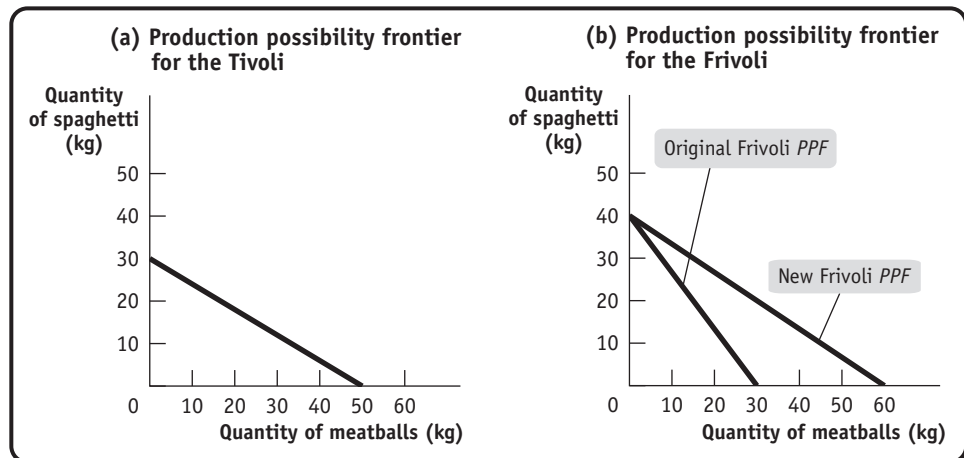
Solution

3. a. If resources are left unused, then this combination of production must lie inside the production possibilities frontier. So it is feasible, but it cannot be efficient.
- b. The transfer of resources has increased wheat production by 10 million bushels and reduced corn production by 17 million bushels. This is the opportunity cost given in the question, so production is moving to another point on the production possibilities frontier. Therefore, it is both feasible and efficient.
- c. The increase in the production of corn led to a decline in wheat production of 49.62 million bushels ($999.62 - 950$). If the opportunity cost is 0.666 bushels of wheat per bushel of corn, then we should get about 75.5 million more bushels of corn, which is the extra amount of corn produced. So the economy is again moving along its production possibilities frontier and the production point is feasible and efficient.

4. In the ancient country of Roma, only two goods, spaghetti and meatballs, are produced. There are two tribes in Roma, the Tivoli and the Frivoli. By themselves, the Tivoli each month can produce either 30 kg of spaghetti and no meatballs, or 50 kg of meatballs and no spaghetti, or any combination in between. The Frivoli, by themselves, each month can produce 40 kg of spaghetti and no meatballs, or 30 kg of meatballs and no spaghetti, or any combination in between.
- Assume that all production possibility frontiers are straight lines. Draw one diagram showing the monthly production possibility frontier for the Tivoli and another showing the monthly production possibility frontier for the Frivoli. Show how you calculated them.
 - Which tribe has the comparative advantage in spaghetti production? In meatball production?
- In A.D. 100 the Frivoli discover a new technique for making meatballs that doubles the quantity of meatballs they can produce each month.
- Draw the new monthly production possibility frontier for the Frivoli.
 - After the innovation, which tribe now has an absolute advantage in producing meatballs? In producing spaghetti? Which has the comparative advantage in meatball production? In spaghetti production?

Solution

4. a. The accompanying diagram shows the production possibility frontier for the Tivoli in panel (a) and for the Frivoli as the line labelled “Original Frivoli PPF” in panel (b).



The production possibility frontier for the Tivoli was calculated as follows: the Tivoli can produce either 30 kg of spaghetti and no meatballs, or they can produce no spaghetti but 50 kg of meatballs. That is, the opportunity cost of 1 kg of meatballs is $\frac{3}{5}$ of a kg of spaghetti: in order to produce 1 more kg of meatballs, the Tivoli have to give up $\frac{3}{5}$ of a kg of spaghetti. This means that the slope of their production possibility frontier is $-\frac{3}{5}$. A similar argument for the Frivoli shows that their production possibility frontier has a slope of $-\frac{4}{3}$.

- b. For the Tivoli, the opportunity cost of 1 kg of meatballs is $\frac{3}{5}$ of a kg of spaghetti. For the Frivoli, the opportunity cost of 1 kg of meatballs is $\frac{4}{3}$ kg of spaghetti. That is, the Tivoli have a comparative advantage in meatball production because their opportunity cost is lower. For the Tivoli, the opportunity cost of 1 kg of spaghetti is $\frac{5}{3}$ kg of meatballs. For the Frivoli, the opportunity cost of 1 kg of spaghetti is $\frac{3}{4}$ kg of meatballs. That is, the Frivoli have a comparative advantage in spaghetti production because their opportunity cost is lower.

- c. The Frivoli's new production possibility frontier is the line labelled "New Frivoli PPF" in panel (b) of the diagram. Instead of producing 30 kg of meatballs (if they produce no spaghetti), they can now produce 60 kg.
 - d. Now the Frivoli have the absolute advantage in both meatball production and spaghetti production. The Frivoli's opportunity cost of meatballs has now fallen to $\frac{4}{6} = \frac{2}{3}$; that is, for each kilogram of meatballs that the Frivoli now produce, they have to give up producing $\frac{2}{3}$ of a kilogram of spaghetti. Since the Frivoli's opportunity cost of meatballs ($\frac{2}{3}$) is still higher than the Tivoli's ($\frac{3}{5}$), the Tivoli still have the comparative advantage in meatball production. The Frivoli's opportunity cost of spaghetti is $\frac{3}{2}$ kg of meatballs and the Tivoli's is $\frac{5}{3}$ kg of meatballs, so the Frivoli have the comparative advantage in spaghetti production.
5. According to the Canadian International Merchandise Trade Database from Statistics Canada, in December 2012, Canada sold aircraft and spacecraft worth \$27.23 million to China and bought aircraft and spacecraft worth only \$8.1 million from China. During the same month, however, Canada bought \$255.1 million worth of apparel and clothing accessories from China but sold only \$56 253 worth of apparel and clothing accessories to China. Using what you have learned about how trade is determined by comparative advantage, answer the following questions.
- a. Which country has the comparative advantage in aircraft production? In production of apparel and clothing accessories?
 - b. Can you determine which country has the absolute advantage in aircraft production? In apparel and clothing accessories?

Solution

5. a. If trade is taking place according to comparative advantage, then we can conclude that Canada has a comparative advantage in aircraft production and China has a comparative advantage in clothing.
- b. No, we can't say because trade depends only on comparative, not absolute, advantage.
6. Peter Pundit, an economics reporter, states that the European Union (EU) is increasing its productivity very rapidly in all industries. He claims that this productivity advance is so rapid that output from the EU in these industries will soon exceed that of Canada and, as a result, Canada will no longer benefit from trade with the EU.
- a. Do you think Peter Pundit is correct or not? If not, what do you think is the source of his mistake?
 - b. If the EU and Canada continue to trade, what do you think will characterize the goods that the EU sells to Canada and the goods that Canada exports to the EU?

Solution

6. a. Peter Pundit is not correct. He confuses absolute and comparative advantage. Even if the EU had an absolute advantage over Canada in every product it produced, Canada would still have a comparative advantage in some products. And Canada should continue to produce those products: trade will make both the EU and Canada better off.
- b. You should expect to see the EU export those goods in which it has the comparative advantage and Canada export those goods in which it has the comparative advantage.

7. You are in charge of allocating residents to your dormitory's baseball and basketball teams. You are down to the last four people, two of whom must be allocated to baseball and two to basketball. The accompanying table gives each person's batting average and free-throw average.

Name	Batting average	Free-throw average
Kelley	70%	60%
Jackie	50%	50%
Curt	10%	30%
Yui	80%	70%

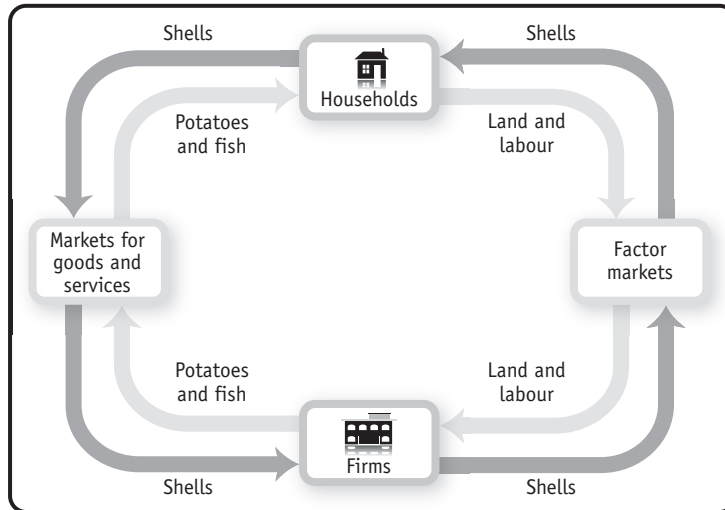
- Explain how you would use the concept of comparative advantage to allocate the players. Begin by establishing each player's opportunity cost of free throws in terms of batting average.
- Why is it likely that the other basketball players will be unhappy about this arrangement but the other baseball players will be satisfied? Nonetheless, why would an economist say that this is an efficient way to allocate players for your dormitory's sports teams?

Solution

- Let's begin by establishing the opportunity cost of free throws for each player. If you allocate Kelley to the basketball team, the team gains a player with a 60% free-throw average and the baseball team loses a player with a 70% batting average. That is, the opportunity cost of allocating Kelley to the basketball team is $\frac{2}{3}$. Similarly, Jackie's opportunity cost of playing basketball is 1; Curt's opportunity cost of playing basketball is $\frac{1}{3}$, and Yui's opportunity cost of playing basketball is $\frac{7}{10}$. Jackie and Curt have the lowest opportunity costs of playing basketball; that is, they have the comparative advantage in basketball. Therefore, they should be allocated to the basketball team. Kelley and Yui have the comparative advantage in baseball and should therefore play on the baseball team.
 - It is likely that the basketball team will be unhappy with this arrangement. Both Jackie and Curt have an absolute disadvantage at playing basketball, compared to the other two players. (They also have an absolute disadvantage at playing baseball, but they are comparatively less bad at basketball than at baseball.) The baseball team is likely to be happy about this allocation because both Kelley and Yui have an absolute advantage at playing baseball. However, if you are concerned with the total number of wins for the dormitory (as an economist who would be concerned about efficiency), this allocation is the best one: it maximizes the overall chances of the dormitory winning at any sport.
- The inhabitants of the fictional economy of Atlantis use money in the form of cowry shells. Draw a circular-flow diagram showing households and firms. Firms produce potatoes and fish, and households buy potatoes and fish. Households also provide the land and labour to firms. Identify where in the flows of cowry shells or physical things (goods and services, or resources) each of the following impacts would occur. Describe how this impact spreads around the circle.
 - A devastating hurricane floods many of the potato fields.
 - A very productive fishing season yields a very large number of fish caught.
 - The inhabitants of Atlantis discover Shakira and spend several days a month at dancing festivals.

Solution

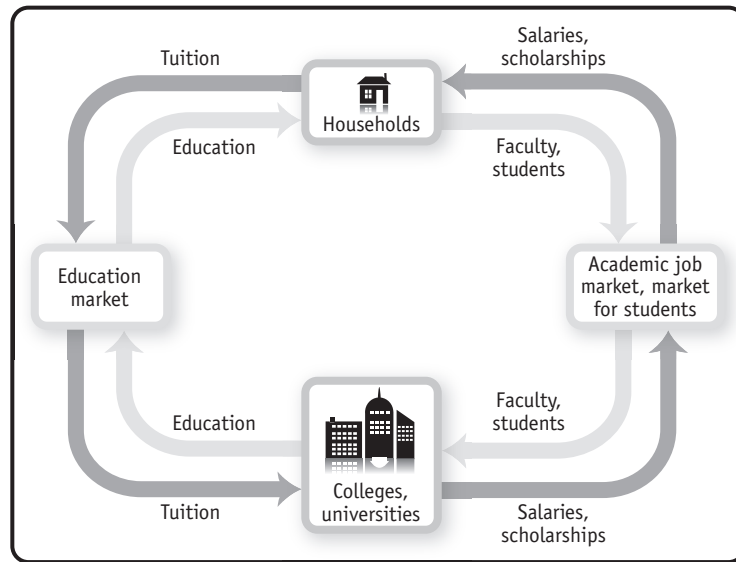
8. The accompanying diagram illustrates the circular flow for Atlantis.



- The flooding of the fields will destroy the potato crop. Destruction of the potato crop reduces the flow of goods from firms to households: fewer potatoes produced by firms now are sold to households. An implication, of course, is that fewer cowry shells flow from households to firms as payment for the potatoes in the market for goods and services. Since firms now earn fewer shells, they have fewer shells to pay to households in the factor markets. As a result, the amount of factors flowing from households to firms is also reduced.
 - The productive fishing season leads to a greater quantity of fish produced by firms to flow to households. An implication is that more money flows from households to firms through the markets for goods and services. As a result, firms want to buy more factors from households (the flow of shells from firms to households increases) and, in return, the flow of factors from households to firms increases.
 - Time spent at dancing festivals reduces the flow of labour from households to firms and therefore reduces the number of shells flowing from firms to households through the factor markets. In return, households now have fewer shells to buy goods with (the flow of shells from households to firms in the markets for goods and services is reduced), implying that fewer goods flow from firms to households.
9. An economist might say that colleges and universities “produce” education, using faculty members and students as inputs. According to this line of reasoning, education is then “consumed” by households. Construct a circular-flow diagram to represent the sector of the economy devoted to college education: colleges and universities represent firms, and households both consume education and provide faculty and students to universities. What are the relevant markets in this diagram? What is being bought and sold in each direction? What would happen in the diagram if the government decided to subsidize 50% of all college and university students’ tuition?

Solution

9. The accompanying diagram shows the circular flow for the education sector.



Colleges and universities buy faculty on the academic job market and attract students from the market for students. (Many colleges and universities actively try to attract good students by offering scholarships and the like.) They sell education to households in the market for education, and households buy education in that market from one (or sometimes several) of the sellers.

If the government subsidized half of all students' tuition, households would demand more education. As a result, colleges and universities would hire more faculty and accept more students, meaning that more money in terms of salaries and scholarships would flow from universities and colleges to the households.

10. Your dormitory roommate plays loud music most of the time; you, however, would prefer more peace and quiet. You suggest that she buy some earphones. She responds that although she would be happy to use earphones, she has many other things that she would prefer to spend her money on right now. You discuss this situation with a friend who is an economics major. The following exchange takes place:

He: How much would it cost to buy earphones?

You: \$15.

He: How much do you value having some peace and quiet for the rest of the semester?

You: \$30.

He: It is efficient for you to buy the earphones and give them to your roommate. You gain more than you lose; the benefit exceeds the cost. You should do that.

You: It just isn't fair that I have to pay for the earphones when I'm not the one making the noise.

- Which parts of this conversation contain positive statements and which parts contain normative statements?
- Construct an argument supporting your viewpoint that your roommate should be the one to change her behaviour. Similarly, construct an argument from the viewpoint of your roommate that you should be the one to buy the earphones. If your dormitory has a policy that gives residents the unlimited right to play music, whose argument is likely to win? If your dormitory has a rule that a person must stop playing music whenever a roommate complains, whose argument is likely to win?

Solution

- 10.** a. “It is efficient for you to buy the earphones” is a positive statement (it is either right or wrong); that is, it is about description. “You should do that” (that is, buy the earphones) is strictly speaking a normative statement; that is, it is about prescription (although you would find all economists agree that all trades that improve efficiency should be made). “It just isn’t fair” is a normative statement—that is, it is about prescription—and you would likely find much disagreement about the fairness of the proposed trade.
- b. One argument that your roommate should buy the earphones is that everyone has the right to peace and quiet. If your roommate therefore wants to listen to music, she should have to be responsible for making sure that others’ peace and quiet is not disturbed. Your roommate might argue that since she has the right to play as much music as she wants, it is your responsibility to make sure that you are not disturbed—for instance, by buying her earphones. If the dormitory has a policy that establishes the right to unlimited music, your roommate’s argument wins. If the rule is that there is a right to peace and quiet, your argument wins.
- 11.** A representative of the Canadian clothing industry recently made the following statement: “Workers in Asia often work in sweatshop conditions earning only pennies an hour. Canadian workers are more productive and as a result earn higher wages. In order to preserve the dignity of the Canadian workplace, the government should enact legislation banning imports of low-wage Asian clothing.”
- a. Which parts of this quote are positive statements? Which parts are normative statements?
- b. Is the policy that is being advocated consistent with the preceding statements about the wages and productivities of Canadian and Asian workers?
- c. Would such a policy make some Canadians better off without making any other Canadians worse off? That is, would this policy be efficient from the viewpoint of all Canadians?
- d. Would low-wage Asian workers benefit from or be hurt by such a policy?

Solution

- 11.** a. The first two sentences contain the positive statements about wages and about productivity and its connection with wages. The last sentence, recommending the ban on imports, is normative.
- b. The policy advocated could be consistent with the positive statements. The statements about wages and productivity are related to absolute advantage. However, the Asian workers could have a comparative advantage (and in reality do have a comparative advantage). Without protection against imports, the Canadian workers could be displaced by cheaper imports. If “preserving the dignity of the Canadian workplace” means those workers keeping their jobs, then protection might be necessary (unless the Canadian workers have some special niche market).
- c. The policy would make Canadian clothing workers better off, but the buyers of cheap imported clothing worse off. By moving the country away from its areas of comparative advantage, total incomes in Canada would have to be lower; the policy would therefore be inefficient from the viewpoint of all Canadians.
- d. Some low-wage Asian workers would be worse off if exports to Canada stopped. As with Canada, Asia would have some resources moved out of the sector where it has a comparative advantage, so total incomes would fall.

- 12.** Are the following statements true or false? Explain your answers.
- a. “When people must pay higher taxes on their wage earnings, it reduces their incentive to work” is a positive statement.
 - b. “We should lower taxes to encourage more work” is a positive statement.
 - c. Economics cannot always be used to completely decide what society ought to do.
 - d. “The system of public education in this country generates greater benefits to society than the cost of running the system” is a normative statement.
 - e. All disagreements among economists are generated by the media.

- 12.** **a.** True. This is a positive statement. It has a factual answer; that is, it is either right or wrong. There has been some debate about whether the statement is actually true or false, but in principle there is only one answer.
- b.** False. This is a statement about what we should do, and this statement has no clearly right or wrong answer. Your view will depend on whether you think encouraging more work is a good or a bad idea.
- c.** True. Economics is best at giving positive answers, for instance, answers about what the most efficient way is of achieving a certain aim. The question of how society ought to be organized is mostly decided in the realm of politics.
- d.** False. This is a positive statement. In principle, it has an answer that is either right or wrong.
- e.** False. Some disagreements among economists arise from the fact that in building a model, one economist thinks that a certain abstraction from reality is admissible but another economist may think that that abstraction is not admissible. Some disagreements arise from the fact that economists sometimes disagree about values.

- 13.** Evaluate the following statement: “It is easier to build an economic model that accurately reflects events that have already occurred than to build an economic model to forecast future events.” Do you think this is true or not? Why? What does this imply about the difficulties of building good economic models?

- 13.** True. With hindsight it is easier to see the important features of the situation that a model should have captured. For predictive purposes, a model needs to anticipate which features of reality are important (and so should be included) and which are unimportant (and so can be ignored). This is why the famed British economist John Maynard Keynes referred to economics as an art as well as a science.

- 14.** Economists who work for the government are often called on to make policy recommendations. Why do you think it is important for the public to be able to differentiate normative statements from positive statements in these recommendations?

- 14.** Positive statements are those based on fact—or at least on our best estimate of what the facts are. Therefore, these statements are also those that do not depend on the political views of the economist. Normative statements may sometimes be influenced by the economist’s own values. Whether someone agrees with an economist’s normative statement may depend on whether they share values. It is therefore important that the public be able to distinguish normative from positive statements.

- 15.** The mayor of Gotham City, worried about a potential epidemic of deadly influenza this winter, asks an economic adviser the following series of questions. Determine whether a question requires the economic adviser to make a positive assessment or a normative assessment.
- a. How much vaccine will be in stock in the city by the end of November?
 - b. If we offer to pay 10% more per dose to the pharmaceutical companies providing the vaccines, will they provide additional doses?
 - c. If there is a shortage of vaccine in the city, whom should we vaccinate first—the elderly or the very young? (Assume that a person from one group has an equal likelihood of dying from influenza as a person from the other group.)
 - d. If the city charges \$25 per shot, how many people will pay?
 - e. If the city charges \$25 per shot, it will make a profit of \$10 per shot, money that can go to pay for inoculating poor people. Should the city engage in such a scheme?

Solution

- 15.**
- a. Positive
 - b. Positive
 - c. Normative
 - d. Positive
 - e. Normative
- 16.** Assess the following statement: “If economists just had enough data, they could solve all policy questions in a way that maximizes the social good. There would be no need for divisive political debates, such as whether the government should provide free medical care for all.”

Solution

- 16.** What is true is that if economists had enough data, they could predict precisely what the outcome would be of any proposed policy (such as free medical care). That is, economists can answer positive questions. But no amount of data can lead to a determination about what a society should do—that is a normative question. An economist can predict how much it will cost to provide free medical care and what effects different ways of raising taxes will have on people’s behaviour (for instance, a sales tax will reduce consumption behaviour; an income tax may discourage workers from working as much as before). But whether this is a trade-off worth making is a question that can be answered only in political discourse.

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