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The desperation threshold: a model to explain decisions in poverty

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Propositions/Stellingen

Propositions relating to the subject of the dissertation:

- Poverty does not uniformly leads to either risk-aversion or risk-taking. Instead, it polarizes populations into a mixture of risk-avoiders --- those who barely make ends meet ---, and desperate risk-takers gambling for a way to make ends meet. (Chapter 4)
- The desperation threshold model reconciles empirical results associating poverty with both risk taking and risk avoidance. (Chapter 5)
- The desperation threshold can explain why poverty increases time discounting. (Chapter 3)
- The desperation threshold model explains why poverty generates violence, when violence functions as a toughness signal. (Chapter 2)
- The desperation threshold model provides a common formal framework for ideas developed independently in development economics, agricultural economics, sociology, psychology, and evolutionary biology. (Chapter 5)

Propositions relating to the field of the subject of the dissertation:

- Despite its limited predictive power, rational choice and methodological individualism are useful frameworks for theoretical social sciences.
- Social sciences should formalize verbal theories.
- Empirical studies of behaviour in situations of poverty should test non-linear statistical models.
- Social sciences should not start from the assumption that decisions taken in poverty are irrational and counter-productive.

Propositions on one or more societal subjects of the candidate's choice:

- To reduce crime and impulsive behaviour among deprived populations, one should intervene on material conditions. In desperate circumstances, legal deterrence is understandably helpless, and interventions on preferences are likely ineffective and arguably unethical.
- States should concentrate resources on the poorest citizens, both to minimize suffering and to reduce negative externalities.