

A Loglinear Tax and Transfer Function: Majority Voting and Optimal Rates

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Abstract

This paper explores the use of a loglinear tax and transfer function, displaying increasing marginal and average tax rates along with a means-tested transfer payment. The two parameters are a break-even income threshold, where the average tax rate is zero, and a tax parameter equivalent to the marginal tax rate at the break-even income level. When combined with Cobb-Douglas utility, the resulting labour supply is fixed and independent of the individual's wage rate. For an additive social welfare function involving the sum of logarithms of (indirect) utilities, a convenient expression is available for the optimal tax rate in a framework in which individuals differ only in the wage rate they face. It is shown that a unique optimal rate exists, which depends on the preference for consumption and the inequality of wage rates. This coincides with the majority voting equilibrium rate. As with the linear tax function, higher inequality is associated with choice of a higher tax rate.

JEL Classification: I310; H210; H310

1. Introduction

The simple linear tax function has long been a 'workhorse' of tax analysis. Its two parameters, the unconditional basic income received by everyone and the fixed marginal (and hence average) tax rate applied to non-transfer income, are easily interpreted and the linear form often makes analysis tractable. Furthermore a basic-income-flat-tax structure (BI-FT) has been advocated by some policy commentators. The linear structure gives rise to fairly simple labour supply functions, when combined with conventional utility functions such as Cobb-Douglas and CES. When used in models with a government budget constraint, the loss of a degree of freedom in policy choices means that only the marginal tax rate can be chosen independently, and hence the linear tax can be incorporated into (unidimensional) majority voting and optimal tax models, although strong assumptions are often required if explicit solutions are to be available.

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The aim of this paper is to examine the use of a convenient alternative specification – a loglinear relationship between net, or after-tax, income and gross income – which has received relatively little attention in the tax literature. This can also be useful when it is required to introduce a stylised income tax function into a wider model. For example, it can provide a smooth two-parameter approximation to a multi-step schedule having a range of marginal rates between income thresholds. The loglinear form has both increasing average tax rates with income, required for progressivity, and increasing marginal tax rates with income. Studies using this form purely as an income tax function include Edgeworth (1925), Dalton (1954), Creedy (1979), Atkinson (1983), Hersoug (1984), Waterson (1985), Creedy and McDonald (1992), Creedy and Gemmell (2006). However, a simple modification to the function allows it to cover means-tested transfer payments (negative income taxation) in addition to positive tax payments. Unlike the linear form, which has no means-testing and a flat tax, the loglinear tax has income-testing of transfers and an increasing marginal tax rate. Yet when combined with commonly used utility functions, it produces relatively simple labour supply behaviour. This form has been used, for example, by Benabou (1996) in the context of an overlapping generation's model.

There is now a long tradition involving the analysis of simple stylised tax structures in the context of models which allow for very little population heterogeneity. Typically individuals are assumed only to have different income-earning abilities. The models are used mainly to explore the nature of the relationships involved and the complexities associated with modelling choice mechanisms, such as majority voting and optimal taxation. Strong assumptions regarding preferences and the wage distribution are needed to obtain transparent results. The analyses are thus not designed to provide practical policy advice and cannot be expected to reflect actual labour supply behaviour, where tax and transfer structures invariably involve many thresholds and marginal rates. The present analysis is in this tradition, and hence its limited scope must be stressed. However, it seems useful to provide the detailed results for comparison with the 'standard' linear tax model.

Section 2 describes the loglinear function and investigates the resulting government budget constraint. Section 3 then considers individual maximisation and labour supply behaviour using the simple Cobb-Douglas utility function. Majority voting is examined in section 4. The standard optimal tax framework, involving maximisation of a utilitarian social welfare function specified in terms of individuals' utilities, is then examined in section 5. It is shown that direct comparisons between majority voting and optimal tax choices can be made when using strong specific assumptions about preferences, the wage rate distribution and the nature of value judgements. Brief conclusions are in section 6.

2. A Loglinear Tax Function

The first subsection describes the loglinear function and the interpretation of its two parameters. The resulting government budget constraint, which imposes a loss of a degree of freedom in policy choices, is derived in the second subsection.

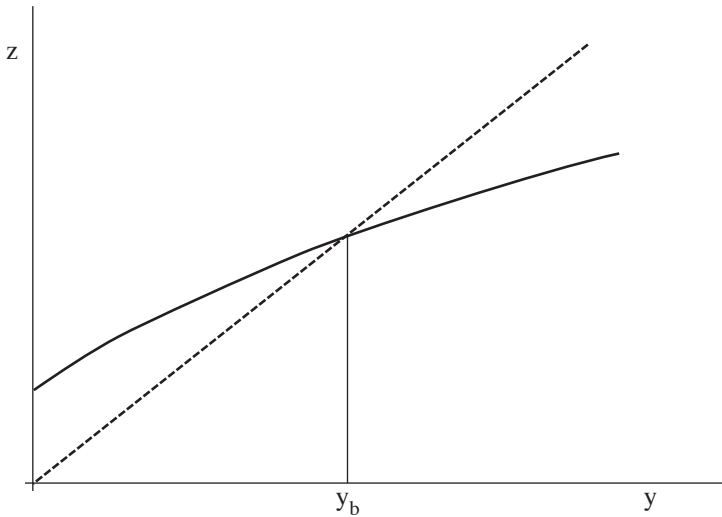
Progressive Taxes and Transfers

Define z and y respectively as the net income and gross income of an individual. Suppose taxes and transfers are described by a loglinear tax function, with parameters $\tau < 1$ and y_b , as follows:

$$z = y^{1-\tau} y_b^\tau \quad (1)$$

The parameter, y_b , is the break-even income level at which individuals neither pay tax nor receive transfers; that is, when $y = y_b$, then $z = y$. It would of course be possible to specify the function as $z = by^\tau$, where b represents the maximum transfer payment (available to those with $y = 1$). However, it is more convenient to have the break-even level more transparent, as in the specification above. Figure 1 demonstrates the nonlinear relationship between the disposable income and gross income. An individual with income above y_b pays tax and an individual below the break-even income receives a benefit. Transfers are effectively means-tested, falling to zero at y_b .

Figure 1 - The Loglinear Tax Function



Consider the minimum level of net income, z_{\min} , which is obtained where gross income is equal to 1. Rewrite (1) in logarithmic form as $\log z = (1 - \tau)\log y + \tau \log y_b$. Hence:

$$\log z_{\min} = \log z|_{y=1} = \tau \log y_b \quad (2)$$

and minimum net income is equal to y_b^τ . This represents the maximum transfer payment available.

Unlike a standard piecewise linear tax function, where fixed marginal effective tax rates apply between specified income thresholds, the 'tax rate' facing any particular individual is not transparent. Let $T(y)$ denote the tax paid by an individual with gross income, y , so that:

$$T(y) = y - z = y - y^{1-\tau} y_b^\tau \quad (3)$$

Therefore the marginal tax rate, MTR, and average tax rate, ATR, corresponding to income level, y , are respectively:

$$MTR = 1 - (1 - \tau) y^{-\tau} y_b^\tau \quad (4)$$

$$ATR = 1 - y^{-\tau} y_b^\tau \quad (5)$$

The parameter, τ , is thus the marginal rate at the income level, $y = y_b$, at which the average rate is zero. A progressive tax system is defined as one in which the average tax rate increases when income increases, over the whole range of incomes. The average tax rate increases if the marginal tax rate exceeds the average tax rate, and applying this rule it can be shown that progression requires the tax parameter τ to be greater than zero. The loglinear form may perhaps be regarded as providing a convenient smooth approximation, involving just two parameters, to a piecewise linear function having several marginal rates and income thresholds.

The Government Budget Constraint

In a pure transfer system within a single period framework with a pay-as-you-go system (which excludes borrowing or lending by the government), the government budget constraint is such that total net revenue is zero; that is, the total benefits paid to those below y_b are equal to the total tax revenue obtained from those with $y > y_b$. This means that it is not possible to set y_b independently, as a degree of freedom in policy choices is lost. It is necessary to solve for y_b in terms of the parameter, τ .

At this point it is convenient to suppose there is a continuous distribution of income, with distribution function of gross income denoted by $F(y)$, with $0 < y < \infty$. Hence the government budget constraint can be written:

$$\int_0^{y_b} (y^{1-\tau} y_b^\tau - y) dF(y) = \int_{y_b}^{\infty} (y - y^{1-\tau} y_b^\tau) dF(y) \quad (6)$$

Therefore:

$$\int_0^{y_b} y^{1-\tau} y_b^\tau dF(y) + \int_{y_b}^{\infty} y^{1-\tau} y_b^\tau dF(y) = \int_0^{y_b} y dF(y) + \int_{y_b}^{\infty} y dF(y) \quad (7)$$

Hence:

$$y_b^\tau \int_0^{\infty} y^{1-\tau} dF(y) = \int_0^{\infty} y dF(y) \quad (8)$$

The right hand side of this constraint is clearly arithmetic mean gross income, \bar{y} . It is therefore possible to solve for y_b , given any value of τ , in terms of the ratio of the first moment about the origin to the $(1 - \tau)$ th moment about the origin.

However, it is required here to make further progress in obtaining explicit results which allow the precise role of the model's basic parameters to become transparent. Hence it is necessary to make an explicit assumption about the form of the distribution of income from earnings. The following results can therefore claim no generality: they depend on the properties of the assumed distribution (as well as the nature of utility functions). Indeed, the analysis demonstrates, as is so often the case, that very few general results can be obtained. Progress could be made using simple forms such as the Pareto distribution, but in practice this applies only to the upper tail of the distribution. The 'fundamental' distribution here is of course that of wage rates (reflecting exogenous abilities) rather than earnings, so any assumption made at this point about the latter must be consistent with that of wage rates made below. It will be seen that an assumption that gross income is lognormally distributed is consistent with an assumption that the wage rate distribution is also lognormally distributed: this is because the loglinear tax function implies that gross earnings for each individual are proportional to the wage rate, for the particular form of utility function examined (that is, Cobb-Douglas). The lognormal form is widely used to provide an approximation to empirical income distributions, as well as being ubiquitous in the modelling of stylised tax structures. However, in practice the tails are sometimes 'fatter' than those of the lognormal and, depending on the complexity of actual tax and transfer systems, the distribution of income may have additional modes in the form of small 'spikes' where bunching occurs.

If log income has mean, μ_y , and variance, σ_y^2 , then y is said to be distributed as $\Lambda(y|\mu_y, \sigma_y^2)$ and, from the well-known properties of the lognormal distribution, the arithmetic mean income is equal to $\bar{y} = \exp(\mu_y + \sigma_y^2/2)$. Furthermore, the mean value of $y^{1-\tau}$, which appears in the left hand side of (8) given by:

$$\int_0^{\infty} y^{1-\tau} d\Lambda(y) = \exp\left((1-\tau)\mu_y + \frac{\sigma_y^2}{2}(1-\tau)^2\right) \quad (9)$$

Substituting in (8) gives:

$$y_b^{\tau} \exp\left((1-\tau)\mu_y + \frac{\sigma_y^2}{2}(1-\tau)^2\right) = \exp\left(\mu_y + \frac{\sigma_y^2}{2}\right) \quad (10)$$

Thus:

$$\begin{aligned} y_b^{\tau} &= \exp\left(\mu_y + \frac{\sigma_y^2}{2} - (1-\tau)\mu_y - (1-\tau)^2 \frac{\sigma_y^2}{2}\right) \quad (11) \\ &= \exp\left(\tau\mu_y - \frac{\tau\sigma_y^2}{2}(\tau-2)\right) \end{aligned}$$

and:

$$y_b = \bar{y} \exp\left(\frac{\sigma_y^2}{2}(1-\tau)\right) \quad (12)$$

Therefore, the break-even level of income depends positively on average income and the variance of logarithms of the distribution of gross income and negatively on the tax parameter, τ . It is clear from (12) that so long as $\sigma_y^2 > 0$, the break-even income level is above the arithmetic mean income. This contrasts with a linear income tax where redistribution is across the arithmetic mean income. However, if all individuals are identical, so there is no basic inequality and $\sigma_y^2 = 0$, the simple and obvious result is that the break-even income is equal to the common income: in a pure transfer system no-one pays tax or receives a transfer.

If, instead of a pure transfer system, the tax structure has to raise net revenue of g per person in order to finance non-transfer expenditure, then it is clear that the break-even income level must be relatively lower. This means that g must be subtracted from the right hand side of (10), and the break-even income level becomes:

$$y_b = \bar{y} \left(1 - \frac{g}{\bar{y}}\right)^{1/\tau} \exp\left(\frac{\sigma_y^2}{2}(1-\tau)\right) \quad (13)$$

Hence if it is desired to extend the following analysis to cover the case where there is some non-transfer government expenditure per person, which does not enter individuals' utility functions, it is most convenient to express this expenditure as a fixed proportion of arithmetic mean income from employment. Consider again the extreme case where all individuals are identical, so that $\sigma_y^2 = 0$ and, from (13):

$$\frac{y_b}{\bar{y}} = \left(1 - \frac{g}{\bar{y}}\right)^{1/\tau} \quad (14)$$

For any given value of $g/\bar{y} < 1$, the ratio y_b/\bar{y} is less than unity (all identical individuals pay tax to contribute to the non-transfer expenditure) and it increases as the tax rate increases: a higher tax rate means that a smaller proportion of the richer individuals has to be subject to positive net tax payments.

3. Individual Maximization

This section examines utility maximisation, by examining optimal labour supply for Cobb-Douglas direct utility functions. This form is widely used in the optimal tax and *majority-voting* literature, largely for its tractability. It produces explicit solutions for labour supply, allowing the required form of indirect utility functions to be obtained, and leads to a convenient form of the government budget constraint. With a simple linear tax structure, the more general constant elasticity of substitution (CES) form also gives rise to explicit solutions for labour supply, but the complexity of the resulting government budget constraint makes numerical methods imperative. In the present case of a loglinear tax function the CES does not even give rise to interior solutions for optimal labour supply, instead producing a nonlinear equation.

Labour Supply and Earnings

Each individual is assumed to derive utility from consumption, c , which in this static framework is equal to net income, z , and leisure, h . The total time available for work and leisure is normalised to one unit, so that $h \leq 1$. Then the budget constraint facing the individual is:

$$c = \left(w(1-h) \right)^{1-\tau} y_b^\tau \quad (15)$$

The direct utility function is assumed, for convenience, to be Cobb-Douglas, so that:

$$U = c^\alpha h^{1-\alpha} = \left\{ w^{\alpha(1-\tau)} y_b^{\alpha\tau} \right\} (1-h)^{\alpha(1-\tau)} h^{1-\alpha} \quad (16)$$

Differentiating with respect to h gives:

$$\frac{\partial U}{\partial h} = \left(w^{\alpha(1-\tau)} y_b^{\alpha\tau} \right) h^{-\alpha} (1-h)^{\alpha(1-\tau)} \left((1-\alpha) - \alpha(1-\tau) \frac{h}{1-h} \right) \quad (17)$$

The first-order condition for utility maximisation, $\partial U / \partial h = 0$, therefore gives the interior solution for optimal leisure as:

$$h = \frac{1-\alpha}{1-\alpha\tau} \quad (18)$$

Consequently leisure, and thus labour supply, depends on only the preference parameter, α , and the tax parameter, τ , and is independent of the wage rate, w . In a population in which heterogeneity is reflected only in variations among individuals in the wage rate, then all individuals work the same number of hours. This contrasts strongly with the corresponding result for the linear tax function. Labour supply is always positive, under the assumption made above that $\tau < 1$. Hence, again unlike the case of the linear tax function, corner solutions with $h = 0$ and their associated complications do not arise. This can be most convenient when it is required to have a stylised tax structure with endogenous labour supply embedded within a larger model, in which labour supply is not the primary focus of attention.

Gross income is thus simply proportional to the wage rate for each individual, with:

$$y = w(1-h) = \frac{\alpha w(1-\tau)}{1-\alpha\tau} \quad (19)$$

The Indirect Utility Function

Indirect utility, V , is obtained by substituting optimal leisure into the direct utility function:

$$V = \left(w^{\alpha(1-\tau)} y_b^{\alpha\tau} \right) \left(\frac{\alpha(1-\tau)}{1-\alpha\tau} \right)^{\alpha(1-\tau)} \left(\frac{1-\alpha}{1-\alpha\tau} \right)^{1-\alpha} \quad (20)$$

Furthermore, substituting for y_b from the government budget constraint gives, for the first term in brackets in (20):

$$w^{\alpha(1-\tau)} y_b^{\alpha\tau} = w^{\alpha(1-\tau)} \bar{y}^{\alpha\tau} \left\{ \exp\left(\frac{\sigma_y^2}{2}(1-\tau)\right) \right\}^{\alpha\tau} \quad (21)$$

In the case mentioned above where a fixed proportion $\delta = g/\bar{y}$ of revenue is raised for non-transfer purposes, the right hand side of (21) is simply multiplied by $(1-\delta)^\alpha$. Holding δ fixed instead of g means that this adjustment is independent of the tax rate.

It is also necessary to consider the arithmetic mean gross income, \bar{y} , since it is also a function of the tax parameters and the wage rate distribution. Suppose the wage rate distribution is lognormally distributed as $\Lambda(\mu_w, \sigma_w^2)$. Then from (19) the wage rate and gross earnings distributions are related using:

$$\mu_y = \mu_w + \log \frac{\alpha(1-\tau)}{1-\alpha\tau} \quad (22)$$

and:

$$\sigma_y^2 = \sigma_w^2 \quad (23)$$

Hence arithmetic mean income can be expressed in terms of the parameters of the wage rate distribution and the tax structure, along with the common preference parameter, α , using:

$$\bar{y} = \exp\left[\mu_w + \frac{\sigma_w^2}{2} + \log \frac{\alpha(1-\tau)}{1-\alpha\tau}\right] \quad (24)$$

which again uses the standard property of the lognormal distribution that, for example, $\bar{w} = \exp(\mu_w + \sigma_w^2/2)$. As expected, an increase in the tax rate reduces the average income, since:

$$\frac{\partial \bar{y}}{\partial \tau} = \frac{\bar{w}\alpha(1-\alpha)}{(1-\alpha\tau)^2} < 0 \quad (25)$$

and an increase in the (common) preference for consumption raises \bar{y} . In addition:

$$\frac{\partial^2 \bar{y}}{\partial \alpha \partial \tau} = -\frac{\bar{w}(1+\alpha^2\tau-2\alpha)}{(1-\alpha\tau)^3} \quad (26)$$

which may be positive or negative. For the lognormal distribution, median income is less than the average income and, in a pure transfer system, from (12) it is clear that that average income is less than break-even income level. However, this last inequality can be reversed if non-transfer expenditure must be financed from income taxation, as shown from (13). This relationship between median, mean and break-even levels of income holds for all feasible levels of the tax parameter (so long as there is some basic

inequality) in the pure-transfer structure, but it depends on the tax rate if non-transfer expenditure exists. In the present model it must be remembered that all individuals work for all $\tau < 1$, so that the disincentive effects of income taxation are relatively lower than in the linear income tax model, where (depending on their wage rate) many individuals stop working for τ substantially less than unity. Hence, a loglinear transfer system is expected to be more generous to the lower-income groups, in the sense that relatively more people would receive positive transfers, than in a corresponding linear income tax model. The choice of tax rate, and associated break-even level, is considered in detail in the following two sections.

4. Majority Voting

This section examines the *majority-voting* equilibrium choice of tax parameter, τ . In the familiar case of the linear tax function, preferences over the proportional tax rate can be double-peaked. However, as Roberts (1977) showed, a majority-voting equilibrium is guaranteed to exist, identified with the preferences of the median voter (the person with the median wage) if there is hierarchical adherence, whereby the ranking of individuals does not depend on the tax rate. Appeal to hierarchical adherence (or ‘agent monotonicity’) is not needed in the present context because it can be shown that the indirect utility function is concave in τ ; this is a sufficient condition for preferences to be single-peaked. Hence the median voter theorem can be invoked and it is only necessary to examine the preferred value of the individual with median w , denoted w_m .

For convenience, the present and following sections concentrate on the case of a pure transfer system, so that no non-transfer expenditure needs to be financed. First, it is useful to write the median voter’s indirect utility function in (20), after substituting for y_b and \bar{y} , using (12) and (24). Furthermore, for the lognormal distribution, the logarithm of median income is equal to the mean of logarithms, so that $\exp(\mu_w) = w_m$. It is also most convenient to take logarithms, since the value of τ which maximises indirect utility is not affected by monotonic transformations. Then $\log V_m$ becomes:

$$\begin{aligned} \log V_m &= \alpha \log w_m + \alpha \log \alpha + (1 - \alpha) \log(1 - \alpha) \\ &+ \alpha \tau \sigma_w^2 - \frac{\alpha \tau^2 \sigma_w^2}{2} + \alpha \log(1 - \tau) - \log(1 - \alpha \tau) \end{aligned} \quad (27)$$

Differentiating gives:

$$\frac{dV_m}{d\tau} = \alpha(1 - \tau) \sigma_w^2 - \frac{\alpha \tau(1 - \alpha)}{(1 - \tau)(1 - \alpha \tau)} \quad (28)$$

Hence, the median’s choice of tax parameter, τ_m , is given by the solution to:

$$\sigma_w^2 = \frac{\tau_m(1 - \alpha)}{(1 - \tau_m)^2(1 - \alpha \tau_m)} \quad (29)$$

At first sight, a difference between this result for the loglinear tax function and the standard linear function is that the majority-voting equilibrium does not appear to depend on the median wage in relation to the arithmetic mean wage. However, this is subsumed in the variance of logarithms of the wage rate. Rearrangement of $\bar{w} = \exp(\mu_w + \sigma_w^2/2)$, and using $\mu_w = \log w_m$:

$$\sigma_w^2 = 2 \log \frac{\bar{w}}{w_m} \quad (30)$$

and (29) could easily be written in terms of \bar{w}/w_m . A higher variance of logarithms of wages implies greater skewness of the wage rate distribution and a larger distance between the median and arithmetic mean wage rates.

It would be possible to rewrite (29) as a cubic equation in τ_m , suggesting the possibility of three roots. However, writing the right hand side of (29) as $f(\tau) = (1 - \alpha) / \{(1 - \tau)^2 (1 - \alpha\tau)\}$, it can easily be seen that $f(0) = 0$ and $f(1) = \infty$, with $df(\tau)/d\tau > 0$, and $d^2f(\tau)/d\tau^2 > 0$. Thus $f(\tau)$ strictly increases with τ when $0 < \tau < 1$, is convex, and approaches an asymptote at $\tau = 1$. Importantly, this implies that there is a unique solution to (29). The comparative static properties of the model, involving the effects on the majority choice of τ of variations in α and σ_w^2 , can be investigated using implicit differentiation, where (29) is written as $F(\tau_m, \alpha, \sigma_w^2)$. It can be shown that:

$$\frac{d\tau_m}{d\alpha} = -\frac{F_\alpha}{F_\tau} > 0 \quad (31)$$

and:

$$\frac{d\tau_m}{d\sigma_w^2} = -\frac{F_{\sigma_w^2}}{F_\tau} > 0 \quad (32)$$

The clear result that the choice of tax parameter increases as basic wage rate inequality increases is also obtained for the linear income tax structure. Furthermore, the linear tax combined with homogeneous preferences also produces the result that the median voter's choice of tax rate increases as the preference for consumption (net income) increases. Essentially, this arises in the linear tax case because a higher preference for consumption implies higher labour supplies and hence a higher arithmetic mean taxable income and unconditional transfer: redistribution benefits the median voter, who is below the arithmetic mean, and so a higher tax rate is unambiguously chosen.¹

However, with the present loglinear tax function, the intuition is less obvious. The median voter's utility must increase as a result of a joint increase in α and τ , which satisfies the government budget constraint. Hence the median voter's choice must satisfy:

¹ For the linear structure, Hodler (2008) has shown that if the preference for leisure varies among individuals (such that hierarchical adherence exists), a greater deviation between the median voter's preference for leisure and the average preference parameter is important. A higher median preference compared with the arithmetic mean is associated with a higher chosen tax rate. In that case, the median voter benefits by being able to have relatively more leisure and a higher degree of redistribution.

$$\frac{dV_m}{d\tau} = \frac{\partial V_m}{\partial \tau} + \frac{\partial V_m}{\partial \alpha} \frac{d\alpha}{d\tau} = 0 \quad (33)$$

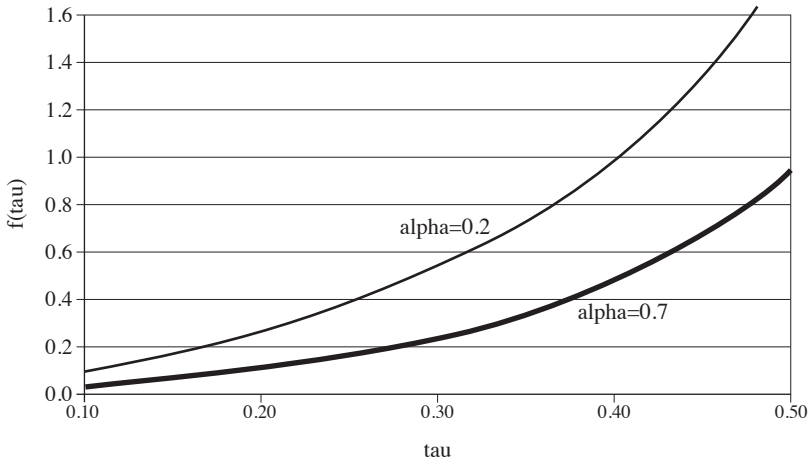
rather than simply setting the right hand side of (28) equal to zero. Hence, of concern is whether:

$$\left. \frac{d\tau}{d\alpha} \right|_{V_m} = - \frac{\partial V_m / \partial \alpha}{\partial V_m / \partial \tau} > 0 \quad (34)$$

In view of the nonlinearity of the first-order condition, reliance must be placed on the implicit differentiation above.

The nature of the solution can be illustrated further using figure 2. The vertical axis shows how the right hand side of (29), $f(\tau)$, varies with τ , for two different values of α . It is again clear from these schedules in figure 2 that the median voter's choice of τ has one feasible solution. For any given value of wage inequality, σ_w^2 , the median voter's choice is thus easily obtained from the diagram. For example, if $\sigma_w^2 = 0.5$, τ_m is equal to 0.29 for $\alpha = 0.2$ and is 0.41 for $\alpha = 0.7$. Furthermore, the diagram illustrates the comparative static result reported above that the choice of tax parameter increases as the inequality of the wage rate distribution increases, and as the weight attached to consumption in the (common) utility function increases.

Figure 2 - Variation in $f(\tau)$ with τ for Alternative α



5. A Social Welfare Function

Consider the choice of tax rate by an independent judge or policy maker, whose value judgements can be described by an individualistic, additive and Paretean welfare, or evaluation, function, W , satisfying the principle of transfers. The welfare function is expressed in terms of individuals' (indirect) utilities, and thus described as 'welfarist'.

Aversion to inequality on the part of the judge is reflected in the degree of concavity of the weighting function, $H(V)$, with:

$$W = \int H(V(w)) d\Lambda(w) \quad (35)$$

In the literature on optimal linear taxation, $H(V)$ is usually specified as taking a constant relative inequality aversion form, $H(V) = V^{1-\varepsilon}/(1-\varepsilon)$, with ε measuring the degree of aversion. Even in the simplest of frameworks, where individuals are assumed to have identical utility functions and therefore differ only in the wage rate, it is well known that a closed-form solution for the optimal linear tax cannot be obtained unless special (quasi-linear) utility functions are used, or various approximations are made; see Creedy (2009).

In the present context the derivation of the optimal loglinear tax rate becomes intractable except for the case where $\varepsilon = 1$, whereby $H(V) = \log V$. Hence, this section concentrates on the optimal value of the tax parameter, τ , for a utilitarian social evaluation function of the form:

$$W = \int \log V d\Lambda(w) \quad (36)$$

where integration is over the whole range of wages. Mention should also be made of the inescapable point that the optimal rate is not invariant with respect to monotonic transformations of utility. That is, the cardinalisation of utility functions – a fundamental requirement if the interpersonal comparisons, necessary for the use of a social welfare function, are to be made – matters. Indeed the form in (36), with unit inequality aversion, in combination with (20), is equivalent to the optimal rate with zero inequality aversion and a cardinalisation of utility given by taking logarithms of the indirect utility function. Keeping with the cardinalisation used above, substituting V from (20) into (36), and remembering that $\sigma_y^2 = \sigma_w^2$, gives for a pure-transfer system:

$$W = \log \left[\left(\frac{\alpha(1-\tau)}{1-\alpha\tau} \right)^{\alpha(1-\tau)} \left(\frac{1-\alpha}{1-\alpha\tau} \right)^{1-\alpha} \left\{ \exp \left(\frac{\sigma_w^2}{2} (1-\tau) \right) \right\}^{\alpha\tau} \right] \quad (37)$$

$$+ \alpha(1-\tau) \int \log w d\Lambda(w) + \alpha\tau \bar{y}$$

with \bar{y} given by (24). Since the mean log-wage is $\int \log w d\Lambda(w) = \mu_w$, this can be written as:

$$W = \alpha(1-\tau) \log \alpha(1-\tau) - (1-\alpha\tau) \log(1-\alpha\tau) \quad (38)$$

$$+ (1-\alpha) \log(1-\alpha) + \frac{\alpha\sigma_w^2}{2} \tau(1-\tau)$$

$$+ \alpha\mu_w + \alpha\tau \left\{ \frac{\sigma_w^2}{2} + \log \frac{\alpha(1-\tau)}{1-\alpha\tau} \right\}$$

The first two lines of (38) correspond to the first line of (37), while the last line of (38) corresponds to the second line of (37). Differentiating with respect to τ , setting $dW/d\tau = 0$ and rearranging eventually gives the optimal tax parameter, τ_{SWF} , as the root of the following nonlinear equation:

$$\sigma_w^2 = \frac{\tau_{SWF}(1-\alpha)}{(1-\tau_{SWF})^2(1-\alpha\tau_{SWF})} \quad (39)$$

Comparison with (29) shows that the optimal choice, with $\varepsilon = 1$, is exactly the same as the majority-voting equilibrium, $\tau_m = \tau_{SWF}$, in this case where wage rates are lognormally distributed and preferences follow the Cobb-Douglas form.

6. Conclusions

This paper has explored the use of a loglinear tax and transfer function as an alternative to the linear form that has received so much attention in the public finance literature. The loglinear function displays increasing marginal and average tax rates along with a means-tested transfer payment. It consists of two parameters, a break-even income threshold, where the average tax rate is zero, and a tax parameter. The latter is the marginal tax rate at the gross income level for which the average tax rate is zero.

In view of the extreme simplicity of both the linear and loglinear tax models, along with the framework of analysis in which they are used, it cannot be expected that they can contribute to empirical understanding of labour supply or offer specific policy advice. However, their analysis can help to gain an appreciation of the kind of relationships which need to be considered in practice, and the possibilities of making progress with more realistic specifications. The linear model, for example, has been used to examine the nature of the interdependencies and problems involved in the choice of tax rate (either by voting systems or by an independent judge adopting clearly stated value judgements). One difficulty is that the examination of these issues becomes extremely complex very quickly, when any attempt is made to add more realism to the structures. In view of the fact that the loglinear tax function has not previously been used in the present context, it is useful to consider how it compares with the use of a linear tax, while keeping in mind the fact that results in this area can be obtained only when strong and simple assumptions are made regarding the model's structure.

When combined with Cobb-Douglas utility, the resulting labour supply is particularly simple, implying a positive labour supply that is independent of the individual's wage rate, but depends on the tax parameters. This in turn means that, for each individual, gross earnings are proportional to the wage rate. Unlike the linear tax model, where there are generally some non-workers, there is a simple relationship between the endogenous distribution of gross earnings and the more 'fundamental' exogenous distribution of wage rates, if it is assumed that individuals have identical preferences. The use of a lognormal distribution then makes it possible to express the government budget constraint, and thus the relationship between the two tax parameters, in a particularly convenient manner.

When examining the choice of tax parameter, it was found, by considering the indirect utility function, that individuals' preferences regarding the tax parameter

are single-peaked. Hence the median-voter theorem can be applied. For the particular assumptions adopted for preferences and the wage rate distribution, the choice of tax parameter by the median voter cannot be expressed as a closed-form solution. However, it was found to be the unique root of a nonlinear equation involving the variance of logarithms of wages and the exponent on net income (consumption) in the utility function. This enables the role of basic wage inequality to become transparent. As with the linear tax function, higher basic inequality is associated with choice of a higher tax parameter. Considering the optimal choice of tax parameter by an independent judge who maximises an additive social welfare function with constant relative inequality aversion, it was found that in general clear results could not be obtained. However, the special assumption of unit relative aversion on the part of the judge implies a welfare function expressed in terms of the sum of logarithms of (indirect) utilities. In this special case the resulting nonlinear expression obtained for maximisation of the social welfare function was found to take the same form as with the median voter's choice. Hence the use of constant relative inequality aversion of unity, which implies a relatively high trade-off between equity and efficiency, coincides with the majority choice, even though the median voter is entirely selfish and has no concern for inequality.

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