

ECON 337901

FINANCIAL ECONOMICS

Peter Ireland

Boston College

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Consumer Optimization

1. Graphical Analysis
2. Algebraic Analysis
3. Time Dimension
4. Risk Dimension

Consumer Optimization: Graphical Analysis

Consider a consumer who likes two goods: apples and bananas.

Y = income

c_a = consumption of apples

c_b = consumption of bananas

p_a = price of an apple

p_b = price of a banana

The consumer's budget constraint is

$$Y \geq p_a c_a + p_b c_b$$

Consumer Optimization: Graphical Analysis

So long as the consumer always prefers more to less, the budget constraint will always bind:

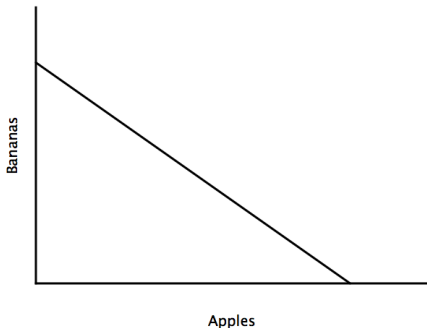
$$Y = p_a c_a + p_b c_b$$

or

$$c_b = \frac{Y}{p_b} - \left(\frac{p_a}{p_b} \right) c_a$$

Which shows that the graph of the budget constraint will be a straight line with slope $-(p_a/p_b)$ and intercept Y/p_b .

Consumer Optimization: Graphical Analysis



The budget constraint is a straight line with slope $-(p_a/p_b)$ and intercept Y/p_b .

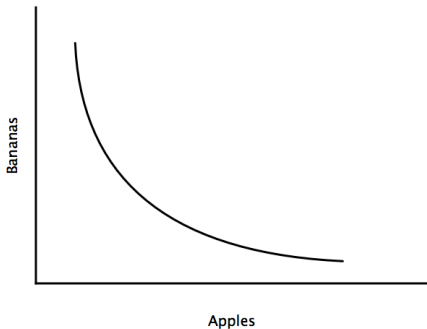
Consumer Optimization: Graphical Analysis

The budget constraint describes the consumer's **market opportunities**.

Francis Edgeworth (Ireland, 1845-1926) and Vilfredo Pareto (Italy, 1848-1923) were the first to use **indifference curves** to describe the consumer's **preferences**.

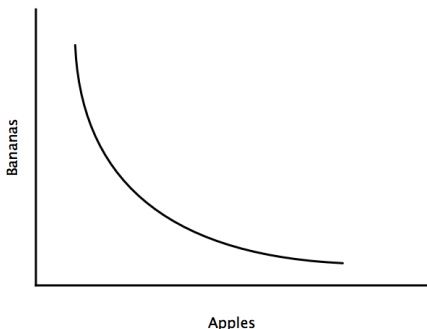
Each indifference curve traces out a set of combinations of apples and bananas that give the consumer a given level of **utility** or satisfaction.

Consumer Optimization: Graphical Analysis



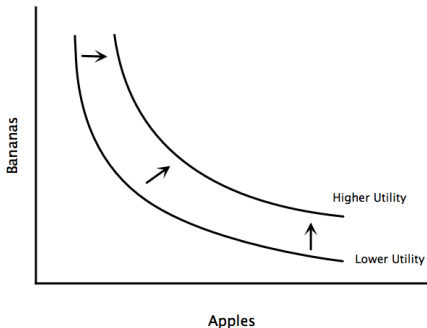
Each indifference curve traces out a set of combinations of apples and bananas that give the consumer a given level of utility.

Consumer Optimization: Graphical Analysis



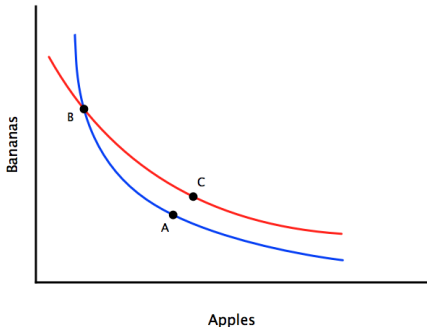
Each indifference curve slopes down, since the consumer requires more apples to compensate for a loss of bananas and more bananas to compensate for a loss of apples, if more is preferred to less.

Consumer Optimization: Graphical Analysis



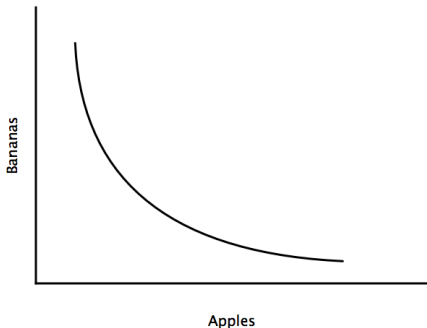
Indifference curves farther away from the origin represent higher levels of utility, if more is preferred to less.

Consumer Optimization: Graphical Analysis



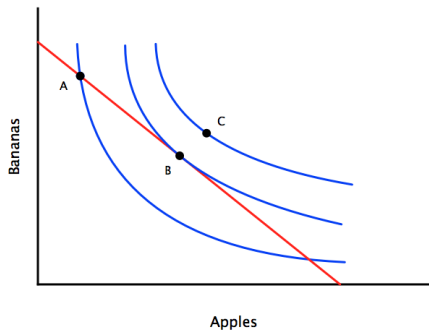
A and B yield the same level of utility, and B and C yield the same level of utility, but C is preferred to A if more is preferred to less. Indifference curves cannot intersect.

Consumer Optimization: Graphical Analysis



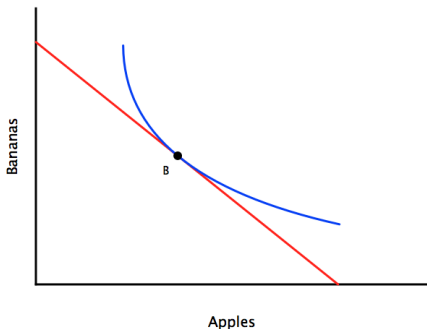
Indifference curves are convex to the origin if consumers have a preference for diversity.

Consumer Optimization: Graphical Analysis



A is suboptimal and C is infeasible. B is optimal.

Consumer Optimization: Graphical Analysis



At B, the optimal choice, the indifference curve is tangent to the budget constraint.

Consumer Optimization: Graphical Analysis

Recall that the budget constraint

$$Y = p_a c_a + p_b c_b$$

or

$$c_b = \frac{Y}{p_b} - \left(\frac{p_a}{p_b} \right) c_a$$

has slope $-(p_a/p_b)$. But what is the slope of the indifference curve?

Consumer Optimization: Graphical Analysis

Suppose that the consumer's preferences are also described by the **utility function**

$$u(c_a) + \beta u(c_b).$$

The function u is increasing, with $u'(c) > 0$, so that more is preferred to less, and concave, with $u''(c) < 0$, so that **marginal utility** falls as consumption rises.

The **parameter** β measures how much more (if $\beta > 1$) or less (if $\beta < 1$) the consumer likes bananas compared to apples.

Consumer Optimization: Graphical Analysis

Since an indifference curve traces out the set of (c_a, c_b) combinations that yield a given level of utility \bar{U} , the equation for an indifference curve is

$$\bar{U} = u(c_a) + \beta u(c_b).$$

But how can we figure out how to graph this equation?