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Intrinsic Motivation in Economics: A History

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Highlights:

- Economists refer to the notion of intrinsic motivation to explain prosocial behavior when no reciprocity is expected.
- The introduction of intrinsic motivation in economics is dated back to Tibor Scitovsky's *The Joyless Economy* and Bruno Frey's articles published in the early 1990s.
- The term "inspired economics" is often used to characterize the work of Scitovsky and Frey, often presented as the continuation of research done by cognitive psychologists on human motivation.
- I show that (i) Scitovsky's work on sources of motivation dates back to the 1940s, long before the emergence of cognitive psychology, and that (ii) Frey's intention was to suggest that psychological concepts can be explained with economic theory rather than to incorporate psychology into economics.
- This article helps us understand how the concept of intrinsic motivation appealed to Scitovsky and Frey for different reasons and what their distinct uses of the concept of "intrinsic motivation" were.

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