

# Is there a Golden Parachute in Sannikov's principal-agent problem ?

**Nizar Touzi**

Ecole Polytechnique, France

**Joint work with Dylan Possamaï**

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# Agent and Principal Criteria

Agent is in charge of the output process

$$dX_t = \alpha_t dt + \sigma dW_t, \quad \alpha_t \in A \quad (\text{compact} \subset \mathbb{R}_+, 0 \in A)$$

and chooses effort process  $\alpha$  so as to balance his cost of effort  $h(\alpha_s)$  by maximizing the utility criterion :

$$J_0^A(\pi, \alpha) := \mathbb{E}^{\mathbb{P}^\alpha} \left[ \int_0^\infty re^{-rs} (u(\pi_s) - h(\alpha_s)) ds \right]$$

Given Agent's optimal response  $\hat{\alpha}(\pi)$ , Principal chooses best compensation scheme so as to maximize

$$J_0^P(\pi, \hat{\alpha}(\pi)) := \mathbb{E}^{\mathbb{P}^{\hat{\alpha}(\pi)}} \left[ \int_0^\infty re^{-rt} (dX_t - \pi_t dt) \right] = \mathbb{E}^{\mathbb{P}^{\hat{\alpha}}} \left[ \int_0^\infty re^{-rt} (\hat{\alpha}_t - \pi_t) dt \right]$$

under Agent's participation constraint

$$J_0^A(\pi, \hat{\alpha}(\pi)) \geq R$$

# Continuation utility and Golden Parachute

Motivated by previous discrete time literature, Sannikov guesses that the continuation utility of the principal  $V_t^P$  only depends on the continuation utility  $Y_t$  of the agent

$$V_t^P = V(Y_t),$$

**Remarks :** 1)  $Y_t \geq 0$  because  $u(\cdot) \geq 0$  and zero effort is legitimate

2) Golden Parachute : constant lifetime payment  $\pi_\tau$  on  $[\tau, \infty)$ . Then

$$Y_t = u(\pi_\tau) \quad \text{and} \quad V_t^P = V(Y_t) = -\pi_\tau = -u^{-1}(Y_t) \quad \text{for all } t \geq \tau$$

## Definition

The model exhibits a Golden Parachute if the principal value function satisfies  $V = F := -u^{-1}$  on  $[y_{gp}, \infty)$  for some  $y_{gp} > 0$

We write **NGP** for No Golden Parachute

# NGP in the first–best version of Sannikov's problem

The first–best optimal contracting problem is :

$$V_0^{P,FB} := \sup \left\{ J_0^P(\pi, \alpha) : \pi \in \Pi, \alpha \in \mathcal{A}, \text{ and } J_0^A(\pi, \alpha) \geq R \right\}$$

Let  $G^*(p) := \sup_{a \geq 0} \{a + ph(a)\}$ , and  $F^*(p) := \inf_{a \geq 0} \{a + pu(a)\}$

## Proposition

$V_0^{P,FB} = \psi(R) := \inf_{p \geq 0} \{Rp - (F^* - G^*)(p)\}$ , with optimal contract  $u(\pi^*) = h(a^*) = (F^*)'(\lambda^*)$ , where  $\lambda^* = \psi'(R)$ .

In particular, optimal contract binds the participation constraint.

By standard Kuhn–Tucker method,

$$\begin{aligned} & \inf_{\lambda \geq 0} \left\{ \lambda R + \sup_{\pi, \alpha} \mathbb{E}^{\mathbb{P}^\alpha} \left[ \int_0^\infty re^{-rt} \left( -(\pi_t + \lambda u(\pi_t)) + (\alpha_t + \lambda h(\alpha_t)) \right) dt \right] \right\} \\ &= \inf_{\lambda \geq 0} \left\{ \lambda R + \sup_{\pi, \alpha} \mathbb{E}^{\mathbb{P}^\alpha} \left[ \int_0^\tau re^{-rt} \left( -F^*(\lambda) + G^*(\lambda) \right) dt \right] \right\} \\ &= \inf_{\lambda \geq 0} \left\{ \lambda R - (F^* - G^*)(\lambda) \right\} = \psi(R) \end{aligned}$$

## Dynamics of Agent's continuation utility

By standard dynamic programming (Martingale optimality principle)

$$dY_t = Z_t dX_t + [rY_t dt + ru(\pi_t) + H(Z_t)] dt \text{ where } H(z) := \sup_a \{az - rh(a)\}$$

with optimal effort process satisfying  $\hat{a}_t \in \hat{A}(Z_t) := \text{Argmax } H(Z_t)$

# Sannikov's elegant method

By standard dynamic programming (Martingale optimality principle)

$$dY_t = r(Z_t dX_t + [Y_t dt + u(\pi_t) + H(Z_t)] dt) \text{ where } H(z) := \sup_a \{az - h(a)\}$$

with optimal effort process satisfying  $\hat{a}_t \in \hat{A}(Z_t) := \text{Argmax} H(Z_t)$

- This trick turns out to be extremely efficient, and was used by many authors since then
- This was the starting point of Cvitanović, Possamaï & NT '17, extended to random horizon by Lin, Ren, NT & Yang '20.

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# Reduction to a control problem

Then, Principal's problem reformulated as

$$V^P = \sup_{\pi, Z} \sup_{\hat{\alpha} \in \hat{A}(Z)} \mathbb{E}^{\mathbb{P}^{\hat{\alpha}}} \left[ \int_0^{\infty} re^{-rt} (\hat{\alpha}_t - \pi_t) dt \right]$$

where  $dY_t = r(Y_t - u(\pi_t) + h(\hat{\alpha}_t))dt + rZ_t dW_t^{\hat{\alpha}}$

Sannikov guesses that  $V^P$  is expected to satisfy the HJB equation

$$v - yv' - \sup_{\pi} \{-\pi + u(\pi)v'\} - \sup_{z, \hat{\alpha} \in \hat{A}(z)} \left\{ \hat{\alpha} + h(\hat{\alpha})v' + \frac{1}{2} r\sigma^2 z^2 v'' \right\} = 0 \text{ on } [0, y_{gp}]$$

with  $v(0) = 0$ , where  $y_{gp}$  is a free boundary such that

$$V(y_{gp}) = F(y_{gp}) \quad \text{and} \quad V'(y_{gp}) = F'(y_{gp}) \quad (\text{smoothfit})$$

and proceeds by verification

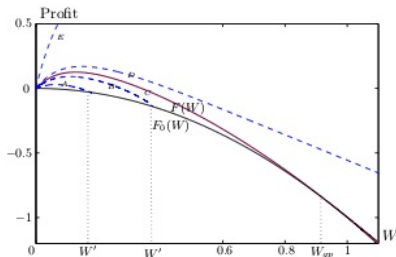


# Sannikov's main findings

- Assume
- $u \in C^1$ , strictly concave increasing,  $u(0) = 0$ ,  $u'(\infty) = 0$
  - $h \in C^1$ , increasing and strictly convex, and  $\beta := h'(0) > 0$

## Sannikov (RES '08)

- There exists a solution  $v$  to the HJB equation
- $V^P = \sup_{Y_0 \geq R} v(Y_0)$
- For small  $Y_0 > 0$ , we have  $V^P = v(Y_0^*)$  for some  $Y_0^* > Y_0$  (informational rent)



## Objectives of our work

- Rigorous formulation of the continuous time contracting problem
- Golden Parachute is not always optimal !
- Informational rent near the origin is always true
- All results hold when Agent and Principal have different discount factors
  - requires to introduce a face-lifted agent's utility function
  - contrasting some conjectures / claims by Sannikov

# Contracts

$\mathbf{C} := (\tau, \pi, \xi) :$ 
  
 $\tau$  stopping time : retirement time
   
 $\pi$  : non-negative continuous payment
   
 $\xi \in \mathbb{L}^0(\mathcal{F}_\tau)$  : non-negative payment at retirement ( $\sim$  GP)

satisfying for some  $r' \in (0, r \wedge \frac{\rho}{\gamma})$  :

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \sup_{\alpha \in \mathcal{A}} \mathbb{P}^\alpha[\tau \geq n] = 0, \text{ and } \sup_{\alpha \in \mathcal{A}} \mathbb{E}^{\mathbb{P}^\alpha} \left[ (e^{-r'\tau} |\xi|)^\gamma + \int_0^\tau (e^{-r's} |\pi_s|)^\gamma ds \right] < \infty$$

- $r, \rho$  discount factors of Agent and Principal
- $\gamma > 1$  : parameter related to the agent's utility function

$$c_0(-1 + \pi^{\frac{1}{\gamma}}) \leq u(\pi) \leq c_1(1 + \pi^{\frac{1}{\gamma}}), \quad \pi \geq 0, \quad \text{for some } c_0, c_1 \geq 0$$

# The contracting problem

Utility criteria of Agent and Principal :

$$J^A(\mathbf{C}, \alpha) := \mathbb{E}^{\mathbb{P}^\alpha} \left[ e^{-rT} u(\xi) + \int_0^T re^{-rs} (u(\pi_s) - h(\alpha_s)) ds \right]$$

$$J^P(\mathbf{C}, \alpha) := \mathbb{E}^{\mathbb{P}^\alpha} \left[ -e^{-\rho T} \xi + \int_0^T \rho e^{-\rho s} (-\pi_s + \alpha_s) ds \right]$$

Agent's utility maximization problem :

$$V^A(\mathbf{C}) := \sup_{\alpha \in \mathcal{A}} J^A(\mathbf{C}, \alpha), \text{ and } \hat{\mathcal{A}}(\mathbf{C}) := \{\hat{\alpha} \in \mathcal{A} : V^A(\mathbf{C}) = J^A(\mathbf{C}, \hat{\alpha})\}$$

Principal's problem :

$$V^P := \sup_{\mathbf{C} \in \mathfrak{C}_R} \sup_{\hat{\alpha} \in \hat{\mathcal{A}}(\mathbf{C})} J^P(\mathbf{C}, \alpha), \text{ where } \mathfrak{C}_R := \{\mathbf{C} \in \mathfrak{C} : V^A(\mathbf{C}) \geq R\}$$

# The contracting problem

Utility criteria of Agent and Principal :  $F := -u^{-1}\mathbf{1}_{[0,u(\infty))} - \infty\mathbf{1}_{[0,u(\infty))^c}$

$$J^A(\mathbf{C}, \alpha) := \mathbb{E}^{\mathbb{P}^\alpha} \left[ e^{-r\tau} \zeta + \int_0^\tau re^{-rs} (\eta_s - h(\alpha_s)) ds \right]$$

$$J^P(\mathbf{C}, \alpha) := \mathbb{E}^{\mathbb{P}^\alpha} \left[ e^{-\rho\tau} F(\zeta) + \int_0^\tau \rho e^{-\rho s} (F(\eta_s) + \alpha_s) ds \right]$$

Agent's utility maximization problem :

$$V^A(\mathbf{C}) := \sup_{\alpha \in \mathcal{A}} J^A(\mathbf{C}, \alpha), \text{ and } \hat{\mathcal{A}}(\mathbf{C}) := \{\hat{\alpha} \in \mathcal{A} : V^A(\mathbf{C}) = J^A(\mathbf{C}, \hat{\alpha})\}$$

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# Face-lifted utility

Principal's relaxed problem :  $V^P = \sup_{\mathbf{C} \in \mathcal{C}_R} \sup_{\alpha \in \mathcal{A}^*(\mathbf{C})} \mathcal{J}^P(\mathbf{C}, \alpha)$ ,

$$\mathcal{J}^P(\mathbf{C}, \alpha) := \mathbb{E}^{\mathbb{P}^\alpha} \left[ e^{-\rho T} \bar{F}(\zeta) + \int_0^T \rho e^{-\rho t} (\alpha_t + F(\eta_t)) dt \right].$$

with **face-lifted** (inverse) utility

$$\bar{F}(y_0) := \sup_{p(\cdot) \geq 0} \sup_{T \in [0, T_0^{y_0, p}]} \left\{ e^{-\rho T} F(y^{y_0, p}(T)) + \int_0^T \rho e^{-\rho t} F(p(t)) dt \right\}$$

where  $T_0^{y_0, p} := \inf \{ t \geq 0 : y^{y_0, p}(t) \leq 0 \}$ , and

$$y^{y_0, p}(0) = y_0, \quad \dot{y}^{y_0, p}(t) = r(y^{y_0, p}(t) - p(t)), \quad t > 0$$

**Proof** : as  $y_0 = e^{-rT} y(T) + \int_0^T e^{-rt} p(t) dt$ , Agent is indifferent between

- lump-sum payment  $\xi(\omega)$  at  $\tau(\omega)$ ,
- payment  $p(t)$  and zero effort on  $[\tau(\omega), \tau(\omega) + T]$ , and retirement deferred to  $\tau(\omega) + T$ , with the lump-sum payment  $\xi'(\omega) := u(y^{\zeta(\omega), p}(T))$

# Face-lifted utility in explicit form

Introduce the concave conjugate functions

$$F^*(p) := \inf_{y \geq 0} \{yp - F(y)\}, \text{ and } \bar{F}^*(p) := \inf_{y \geq 0} \{yp - \bar{F}(y)\}, \quad p \in \mathbb{R}.$$

## Proposition

Assume that  $\gamma\delta > 1$ . Then,  $\bar{F} = (\bar{F}^*)^*$  is decreasing, strictly concave,

- $\bar{F} = F$  for  $\delta = 1$
- $\bar{F}^*(p) = \frac{1}{1-\delta} \left(\frac{|p|}{\delta}\right)^{\frac{1}{1-\delta}} \int_{b_\delta}^{\delta p} |x|^{-1-\frac{1}{1-\delta}} F^*(x) dx$ , with  
 $b_\delta := -\infty$  for  $\delta < 1$ , and  $b_\delta := 0$  for  $\delta > 1$

Moreover,  $\bar{F}(y_0) = \sup_{p \geq 0} \int_0^{T^{y_0, p}} \rho e^{-\rho t} F(p(t)) dt$ ,  $y_0 \geq 0$

# Golden Parachute

## Definition

We say that the contracting model exhibits a **Golden Parachute**, if there exists an optimal contract  $(\tau^*, \pi^*, \xi^*) \in \mathfrak{C}_R$  for the relaxed formulation of the principal problem such that  $\tau^* > 0$ , and  $\mathbb{P}[\xi^* > 0] > 0$ .

In words, GP means that Agent

- ceases any effort at some positive stopping time,
- and retires with non-zero payment



# Reduction to a mixed control–stopping problem

Agent's Hamiltonian

$$h^*(z) := \sup_{a \in A} \{za - h(a)\}, \text{ with } \hat{A}(z) := \{a \in A : h^*(z) = za - h(a)\}$$

By the reduction result of Lin, Ren, NT & Yang '20, we have

$$V^P = \sup_{Y_0 \geq R} V(Y_0), \text{ where } V(Y_0) := \sup_{(\tau, Z, \pi) \in \mathcal{Z}(Y_0)} \sup_{\hat{a} \in \hat{A}(Z)} \bar{J}(\tau, \pi, Z, \hat{a})$$

and

$$\bar{J}(\tau, \pi, Z, \hat{a}) := \mathbb{E}^{\mathbb{P}^{\hat{a}}} \left[ \int_0^\tau \rho e^{-\rho t} (\hat{a}_t + F(\eta_t)) dt + e^{-\rho \tau} \bar{F}(Y_\tau^{Y_0, Z, \pi}) \right]$$

with controlled state

$$dY_t^{Y_0, Z, \pi} = r(Y_t^{Y_0, Z, \pi} + h(\hat{a}_t) - \eta_t) dt + rZ_t \sigma dW_t^{\hat{a}}$$

# Reduction to a mixed control–stopping problem

Define the parameters  $\delta := \frac{r}{\rho}$  and  $\eta := \frac{1}{2}r\sigma^2$ , the dynamic programming equation is :

$$(DPE) \quad v(0) = 0, \text{ and } \min \{v - \bar{F}, \mathbf{L}v\} = 0, \text{ on } (0, \infty),$$

where

$$\mathbf{L}v := v - \delta yv' + F^*(\delta v') - I(\delta v', \delta v'')$$

and

$$I(p, q) := \infty \mathbf{1}_{\{q > 0\}} + \mathbf{1}_{\{q \leq 0\}} l_0(p, q)^+$$

$$l_0(p, q) := \sup_{z \geq h'(0), \hat{a} \in \hat{A}(z)} \{\hat{a} + h(\hat{a})p + \eta z^2 q\}.$$

**Remark :** (DPE) is equivalent to  $v(0) = 0$ , and  $\mathbf{L}v = 0$  on  $(0, \infty)$

# Some cases of NGP

## proposition

Let  $\beta := h'(0)$ . Then there is No Golden Parachute whenever either

(NGP1)  $\beta = 0$ ;

(NGP2) or  $\beta > 0$ ,  $\bar{F}''$  is non-increasing, and  $I_0(\delta\bar{F}'(0), \delta\bar{F}''(0)) > 0$ ;

(NGP3) or  $\beta > 0$ ,  $A$  is an interval, and  $h \in C^3$  with

$$\inf \left\{ \frac{(h'^2)''}{h''} \right\} \geq \frac{1}{\eta} \sup \left\{ -\frac{\bar{F}'}{\bar{F}''} \right\}, \text{ and } \sup (\bar{F}' + 2\eta h''(0)\bar{F}'') \leq \frac{-1}{\delta\beta}$$

If  $F'(0) = 0$  and  $\bar{F}''$  non-increasing, (NGP2) holds if  $\beta^2 \geq \frac{\max A}{-\eta\bar{F}''(0)}$

(NGP3) also excludes GP for large  $\beta$

**Proof** : on the stopping region  $\{v = \bar{F}\}$ , we must have  $\mathbf{L}\bar{F} \geq 0\dots$

# On the importance of the face-lifted utility 1

Consider the slight modification of the criteria of Agent and Principal :

$$J_1^A(\mathbf{C}, \alpha) := \mathbb{E}^{\mathbb{P}^\alpha} \left[ e^{-r\tau} \zeta + \int_0^\tau \cancel{\gamma} e^{-rs} (\eta_s - h(\alpha_s)) ds \right]$$

$$J_1^P(\mathbf{C}, \alpha) := \mathbb{E}^{\mathbb{P}^\alpha} \left[ e^{-\rho\tau} F(\zeta) + \int_0^\tau \cancel{\rho} e^{-\rho s} (F(\eta_s) + \alpha_s) ds \right]$$

$$V_1^P = \sup_{Y_0 \geq R} V_1(Y_0), \text{ where } V_1(Y_0) := \sup_{(\tau, Z, \pi) \in \mathcal{Z}(Y_0)} \sup_{\hat{a} \in \hat{A}(Z)} J_1(\tau, \pi, Z, \hat{a})$$

and

$$J_1(\tau, \pi, Z, \hat{a}) := \mathbb{E}^{\mathbb{P}^{\hat{a}}} \left[ \int_0^\tau e^{-\rho t} (\hat{a}_t + F(\eta_t)) dt + e^{-\rho\tau} F(Y_\tau^{Y_0, Z, \pi}) \right]$$

with controlled state

$$dY_t^{Y_0, Z, \pi} = (rY_t^{Y_0, Z, \pi} + h(\hat{a}_t) - \eta_t) dt + Z_t \sigma dW_t^{\hat{a}}$$

# On the importance of the face-lifted utility 1

HJB equation for this problem :

$$(DPE) \quad v(0) = 0, \text{ and } \min \{v - F, \mathbf{L}_1 v\} = 0, \text{ on } (0, \infty),$$

where

$$\mathbf{L}_1 v := \rho v - ryv' + \inf_{\eta} \{\eta v' - F(\eta)\} - \sup_{z, \hat{a} \in \hat{A}(z)} \left\{ \hat{a} + h(\hat{a})v' + \frac{1}{2} \sigma^2 z^2 v'' \right\}$$

Then,

$$\mathbf{L}_1 F \leq \rho F - ryF' + F^*(F') = (\rho - 1)F + (1 - r)yF' < (\rho - r)F, \quad y > 0$$

as  $F$  is strictly concave. Hence, For  $\rho \geq r$ , we get  $\mathbf{L}_1 F < 0$

If one defines GP as an instance of stopping with positive reward, then the conclusion would be NGP for  $\rho \geq r$ !

# Wellposedness of (DPE)

**Assumption :**  $(F^*)'$ ,  $\bar{F}'$ , and  $\bar{F}''$  are uniformly continuous. Moreover, whenever  $\beta := h'(0) = 0$ , then  $A \supset [0, \bar{a}]$  for some  $\bar{a} > 0$ .

## Theorem (Existence)

Let  $\mathcal{S} := \{v = \bar{F}\}$ . Then

(i) there exists a minimal  $C^2$  solution  $v$  of (DPE), such that  $v$  is concave, ultimately decreasing, and  $0 \leq (v - \bar{F})(y) \leq Cy$ ,  $y \geq 0$ , for some  $C > 0$ ;

(ii) we have  $v'(0) \geq 0$ , and when  $\bar{F}'(0) = 0$ ,

$$v'(0) > 0 \text{ if and only if } I(0, \delta \bar{F}''(0)) > 0;$$

(iii) if  $\beta > 0$ , and in addition the maps  $F$  and  $I_0$  are analytic, then  $v$  is strictly concave and  $\mathcal{S} = \{0\} \cup [y_{gp}, \infty)$  for some  $y_{gp} \in [0, \infty]$ ;

(iv) if  $\beta = 0$ , then  $\mathcal{S} = \{0\}$ .

# Solving the contracting problem

## Theorem (Verification)

Under the previous conditions, and when  $y_{gp} < \infty$ , we have

$$V^P = \sup_{y \geq R} v(y) = v(\hat{y}), \text{ for some } \hat{y} \geq R$$

Let  $\hat{z}, \hat{\pi} : [0, \infty) \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  be maximizers of  $I(\delta v', \delta v'')$  and  $F^*(\delta v')$ , then

- there is a unique weak solution  $\hat{Y} := Y^{\hat{y}, \hat{z}(\hat{Y}), \hat{\pi}(\hat{Y})}$  to the corresponding SDE
- the contract  $(\hat{\tau}, \hat{\pi}(\hat{Y}), u^{-1}(\hat{Y}_{\hat{\tau}}))$  is optimal, where

$$\hat{\tau} := \inf \left\{ t \geq 0 : \hat{Y}_t \notin (0, y_{gp}) \right\}$$

# On the proof of existence

We do not understand Sannikov's argument !

- Postulates existence of  $y_{gp} < \infty$ ,  
then global solution of DPE with  $v'(0) = b$  exists
- Determine  $y_{gp}$  by using the flow continuity in  $b$

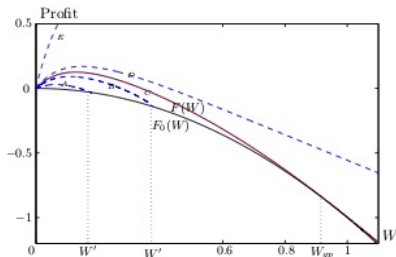


Figure 6: Typical solutions of the HJB equation.

**Our argument :** Prove existence of a supersolution of DPE,  
then as  $F$  is a subsolution, apply Perron existence argument...



# Numerical result 1

Same parameters as in Sannikov '08

$\gamma = 2$ ,  $\eta = 0.05$ ,  $h = 0.5$ ,  $\beta = 0.4$ , and  $\delta = 1$ )

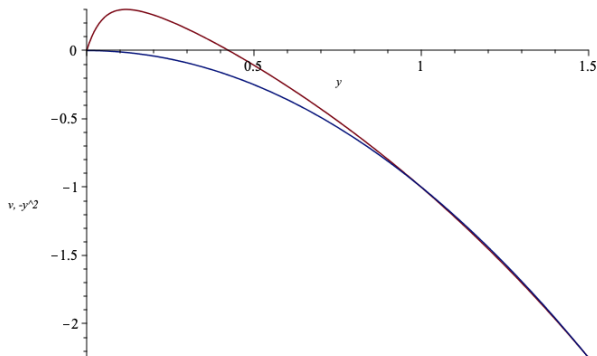


Figure –  $v$  (red),  $F$  (blue) : Golden Parachute exists

## Numerical result 2

$$\delta = 1, \gamma = 3/2, \eta = h = 1, \beta = 0.01, \text{ and } \delta = 1$$

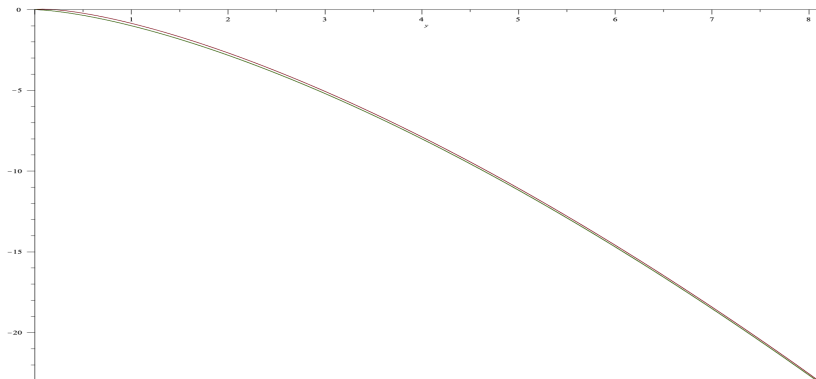


Figure –  $v$  (red),  $F$  (green) : No Golden Parachute

# Numerical result 3

$$\gamma = 3/2, \eta = h = 1, \beta = 0.01, \text{ and } \delta = 3/4$$

Golden parachute does exist

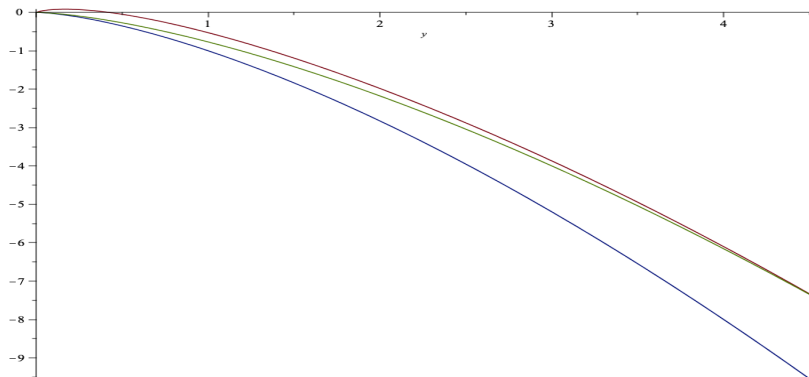


Figure –  $v$  (red),  $\bar{F}$  (green),  $F$  (blue), Golden Parachute exists

# Numerical result 4

$$\gamma = 3, \eta = h = 1, \beta = 0.01, \text{ and } \delta = 2$$

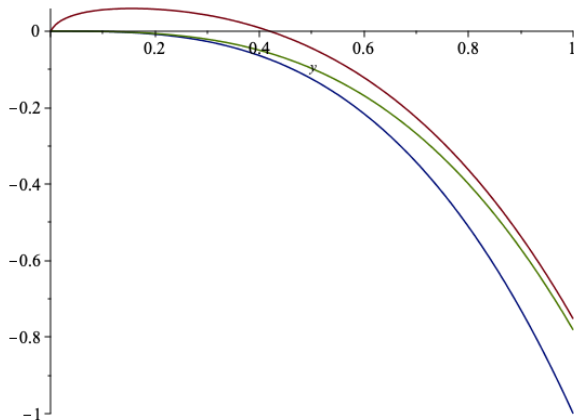


Figure –  $v$  (red),  $\bar{F}$  (green),  $F$  (blue) : No Golden Parachute