The Temporal Integral of the Maximum Entropy Production Principle

Statefulness, Entropic Currents, and the Physics of Phase-Space Viability

Steven J. Newbury

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Abstract

In theoretical physics, the Maximum Entropy Production Principle (MEPP) is typically formulated under the strict constraints of non-equilibrium steady states. However, when extrapolated into biophysical economics and systems ecology, MEPP is frequently misinterpreted as an unconstrained rate-maximising function, improperly conflating it with the Maximum Power Principle (MPP). This paper demonstrates that applying a rate-based maximisation to bounded, stateful Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) guarantees premature structural collapse, paradoxically yielding a lower total quantity of entropy. We propose that a self-consistent formulation of MEPP must optimise the *temporal integral* of entropy production over the entirety of a system's existence. Achieving this integral requires structural memory, defined here as Informational Density (ρ_I), to navigate dynamic environmental limits. Applying optimal control theory to nested CAS recursion, we reframe 'rogue agency' not as a valid evolutionary strategy, but as an open-loop control failure. Anchoring this framework to Boltzmann's equation ($S = k_B \ln \Omega$), we demonstrate that entropic currents naturally bias bounded systems towards K-selected trajectories that preserve viable future phase-space (Ω_{viable}). We provide an explicit falsification condition, proving that homeostatic pacing is a rigorous thermodynamic requirement for systemic endurance.

1. The Conflation of Rate and Integral

In applied biophysical economics [2], MEPP is frequently interpreted as a rate-maximising principle. However, when combined with finite resource constraints, this interpretation leads to trajectories that reduce total entropy production via premature system collapse. Therefore, a rate-based formulation is not self-consistent in bounded, stateful systems. A principle that prescribes trajectories yielding lower total entropy production than available alternatives cannot be a valid extremal principle for the system it purports to describe.

Furthermore, the common phrasing of this rate-maximising behaviour—that systems 'dissipate entropy at the fastest possible rate'—contains a fundamental category error. Systems do not dissipate entropy; they dissipate *exergy* (thermodynamic gradients) and *produce* entropy as exhaust. More critically, defining MEPP [7, 9] by the 'fastest possible rate' conflates it with the Maximum Power Principle (MPP) [3, 5]. MPP governs the instantaneous derivative of exergy consumption (dP/dt). It describes the localised, short-term behaviour of a pioneer system encountering an unrestricted gradient.

However, when applied to a macro-system bounded by a finite gradient and a finite export window (such as the Stefan-Boltzmann T^4 radiator limit), maximising the instantaneous rate of entropy production guarantees the rapid structural collapse of the system. Therefore, the correct formulation of MEPP must be shifted from the instantaneous derivative to the temporal integral. **A system will optimise to generate a maximum *quantity* of entropy over the entirety**

of its existence:

$$\Sigma S = \int_{t_0}^{t_{end}} \dot{S}(t)\, dt \longrightarrow \text{max} \tag{1}$$

2. The Ontological Baseline: Statefulness and Informational Density

This framework operates on the strict physical assumption that the universe is fundamentally an information-processing system. Consequently, the distinction between a state-free dissipation event and a state-dependent adaptive system is the primary variable in thermodynamic evolution.

A state-free system (e.g., a lightning strike) is essentially memoryless. It possesses no internal model or structural identity that must be preserved across a temporal boundary. Governed purely by MPP, it maximises the instantaneous rate of entropy production until the gradient is exhausted.

Conversely, a system attempting to satisfy the temporal integral of MEPP must be **stateful**. To optimise over time (t_{end}), the system must maintain a structural memory of its position within phase-space. Following Landauer's Principle [4], the maintenance of this state is not free; it requires a continuous expenditure of thermodynamic work.

In any stateful CAS, we define the physical footprint of this requirement as **Informational Density (ρ_I)**[1]. ρ_I represents the concentration of stateful, structural information the system must maintain to preserve its internal coherence relative to its available exergy throughput. Maintaining a high ρ_I requires a continuous baseline of exergy dissipation, defined as Maintenance Power (P_{maint}). Goal-seeking in a CAS is thus the emergent, mathematical result of its informational topology (ρ_I) attempting to maintain its coherence against boundary conditions.

3. The Metabolic Governor: The Dynamic Radiator Limit

In the language of optimal control theory, Equation (1) serves as the system's *objective function*, which must be maximised subject to state constraints. The optimisation of the temporal integral is strictly constrained by the system's physical boundaries. The system must satisfy the following dynamic constraint:

$$\text{max}\, \Sigma S \quad \text{s.t.} \quad \dot{S}(t) \cdot \tau_{adj} \leq \Delta S_{buffer} \tag{2}$$

To operationalise this boundary, we perform a dimensional analysis. τ_{adj} operates in units of time $[T]$, representing the latency of the system's internal feedback loops (e.g., minutes for cellular protein synthesis, or decades for atmospheric carbon buffering). ΔS_{buffer} operates in units of entropy $[J \cdot K^{-1}]$, representing the maximum allowable accumulation of unprocessed entropy before internal bonds physically break.

The product $\dot{S}(t) \cdot \tau_{adj}$ represents the transient entropy load $[J \cdot K^{-1}]$. If this load exceeds the ΔS_{buffer} threshold, excess entropy accumulates as internal noise faster than the structure can adapt. This leads to **Metabolic Decoherence** ($\hat{D}_{metabolic}$). A system that ignores this dynamic boundary to maximise the instantaneous derivative triggers a brittle-fracture event, wherein t_{end} collapses towards the present.

[1] Informational Density (ρ_I) is the intensive counterpart to the extensive Institutional Mass (M_I) defined in the Socio-Economic Thermodynamic Entropy (SETE 2.0) framework [1]. Here, focusing on density (ρ_I) better captures the local rigidity and computational overhead per unit of available effective circulating exergy (P_{eff}).

4. Dynamical Forcings and the Non-Guarantee of Homeostasis

Dynamical CAS are open structures subject to continuous **Forcings**. These forcings are the primary drivers of structural change and systemic risk:

- **Internal Forcings:** The system's own metabolic shifts, increases in Informational Density (ρ_I), and the resulting escalation in maintenance demands.
- **External Forcings:** Thermodynamic and informational events originating from the enclosing parent CAS (the host). These are not merely passive 'environmental factors' but are goal-directed transmissions that encode the structural information and ρ_I of the host system's own phase-space trajectory.

Homeostasis, therefore, is not a guaranteed default state; it is a metabolic achievement perpetually at risk of failure. Stability is a precarious, continuous negotiation between internal capacity and external demands.

5. CAS Recursion and Tethered Viability

Because the universe is a nested architecture, the temporal integral of MEPP is fundamentally recursive. No Complex Adaptive System (S_{sub}) exists in isolation.

This leads to the principle of **Tethered Viability**: The maximum lifespan (t_{end}) of an embedded system is mathematically bounded by the t_{end} of its host. If an embedded system adopts a strategy that ignores external forcings or degrades the host's viable phase-space, it prematurely triggers the catabolic collapse of the parent. Because the host provides the exergy gradient and export window, the decoherence of the parent results in the instantaneous termination of the embedded system's state. Therefore, maximising a sub-system's temporal integral ΣS fundamentally requires the preservation of the host's viability.

6. Rogue Agency as Control Failure

The existence of 'rogue' agents—sub-systems that maximise localised power at the expense of the host (such as oncogenic cells or hyper-extractive economies)—is a direct result of **Informational Occlusion**.

In control theory terms, rogue agency represents a severed feedback loop. It occurs when a sub-system's informational topology becomes decoupled from the telemetry of its parent. In this state of **Scalarity Mismatch**, the rogue system operates as a blind, *open-loop controller*, treating external forcings as noise rather than binding constraints.

While it achieves a short-term spike in entropy production, it does so by physically culling the host's viable microstates. Within the context of MEPP, rogue agency is not a valid evolutionary strategy; it is a **Metabolic Calculation Error**. It results in a minimal total quantity of entropy (ΣS) for both the sub-system and the host compared to a prudent, K-selected alternative. Rogue agency is the thermodynamic definition of a self-extinguishing transient.

7. Entropic Currents and the Boltzmann Proof Sketch

To anchor the temporal integral mathematically, we return to Ludwig Boltzmann's foundational equation for entropy: $S = k_B \ln \Omega$. We assert that maximising cumulative entropy production is identical to preserving viable future phase-space:

$$\max \int_{t_0}^{t_{end}} \dot{S}(t)\, dt \equiv \max \int_{t_0}^{t_{end}} \ln \Omega_{viable}(t)\, dt \tag{3}$$

The equivalence along the interior of the trajectory holds due to the extreme concavity of the $\ln \Omega_{viable}$ surface in a bounded system. A pioneer strategy (G_r) might attempt to temporarily reduce Ω_{viable} to generate a massive localised spike in $\dot{S}$. However, because the system is bounded by a finite radiator limit (ΔS_{buffer}), proximity to the decoherence boundary causes an exponential collapse in the number of accessible microstates. The brief spike in the derivative is mathematically overwhelmed by the collapse of the temporal integral as the system strikes the boundary and $\Omega \to 1$.

Why do systems adopt K-selected trajectories to avoid this boundary? We propose a dual-phase mechanism:

1. **Origination via Entropic Currents:** In a bounded phase-space with finite export capacity, the paths of least entropic resistance are those furthest from the decoherence boundary. Drawing on stochastic thermodynamics and fluctuation theorems [6, 8], probability currents (*entropic currents*) flow naturally away from boundary states because those states possess exponentially fewer accessible microstates. The K-strategy is the geometric attractor of the phase-space itself.

2. **Persistence via Entropic Gravity:** Once a system stabilises within this current, it accumulates Informational Density (ρ_I). This overhead actively warps the local phase-space topology, providing a structural resistance (inertia) that locks the system into its stateful trajectory, reinforcing its endurance.

8. Empirical Falsifiability

The formalisation of Informational Density (ρ_I) and Tethered Viability renders this framework empirically testable. The explicit falsification condition for this model is as follows:

If a rogue-agency strategy (G_r) can be empirically demonstrated to produce a greater total quantity of entropy (ΣS) than a K-selected alternative in a bounded system with finite export capacity over its full lifecycle, the integral formulation of MEPP is refuted.

Under this framework, sub-systems with higher scalarity mismatch (e.g., highly financialised extractive firms vs. reinvesting steady-state cooperatives, or oncogenic tumours vs. healthy tissue) must mathematically exhibit shorter t_{end} and lower ΣS than well-coupled sub-systems, regardless of their peak instantaneous $\dot{S}$. Consequently, homeostatic, K-selected pacing is not a passive biological preference, but a rigorous thermodynamic requirement for systemic endurance.

References

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