

The Role of Empathy in Altruistic Behaviour: Evidence from Sequential Dictator Games

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Abstract

We report results from a sequential dictator game in which a proposer (player A) plays a standard dictator game with a recipient (player B). This first stage proposer's division is then revealed to a third player (player C) who in the second stage plays a dictator game with player B. We find that there is a statistically significant negative relationship between the amount received by player B in the first stage and the amount received in the second. In a second treatment, where the first stage is replaced by a random allocation by the experimenter to player B, there is no significant negative relationship that is observed between first stage receipts and second stage giving. Our results indicate that feelings of empathy are procedurally guided, i.e. - whether or not individuals respond to another individual's financial condition depends crucially on whether this condition was as a result of specific human action or whether it was a quirk of fate.

Speaker Profile:

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