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Intention-Based Reciprocity and Signaling of Intentions*

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March 2, 2017

Intentions count in your actions. Abu Bakr

Abstract

Many experiments find that trust intentions are a key determinant of prosociality. If intentions matter, then prosociality should depend on whether trust intentions can be credibly conveyed. This conjecture is formalized and tested in a noisy trust game where I vary the extent to which trust can be credibly signaled. I find that the introduction of noise threatens the onset of trust relations and induces players to form more pessimistic beliefs. Therefore policies that increase transparency of the decision-making environment may foster prosociality. However, the potential impact of such policies could be limited by a large heterogeneity in how individuals respond to changes in their information environment.

JEL classification: C91, D63, D64

Keywords: Trust; Intentions; Reciprocity; Noise; Signaling; Experimental economics

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