Journal of Public Economics 95 (2011) 253–264

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Public Economics

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jpube

Moral judgments in social dilemmas: How bad is free riding?☆

Robin P. Cubitt [a], Michalis Drouvelis [b], Simon Gächter [a,c,*], Ruslan Kabalin [d]

[a] University of Nottingham, United Kingdom
[b] University of Birmingham, United Kingdom
[c] CESifo and IZA, Germany
[d] University of Lancaster, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 21 January 2010
Received in revised form 4 October 2010
Accepted 25 October 2010
Available online 4 November 2010

Keywords:
Moral judgments
Moral psychology
Framing effects
Public goods experiments
Free riding

ABSTRACT

In the last thirty years, economists and other social scientists have investigated people's normative views on distributive justice. Here we study people's normative views in social dilemmas, which underlie many situations of economic and social significance. Using insights from moral philosophy and psychology we provide an analysis of the morality of free riding. We use experimental survey methods to investigate people's moral judgments empirically. We vary others' contributions, the framing ("give-some" versus "take-some") and whether contributions are simultaneous or sequential. We find that moral judgments of a free rider depend strongly on others' behaviour; and that failing to give is condemned more strongly than withdrawing all support.

© 2010 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Prominent among Amartya Sen's many enduring contributions are his arguments for enrichment of the concept of agency used in economic analysis and of the information base of welfare economics.[1] Although these arguments suggest that an individual's normative views may be relevant both to the explanation of her behaviour and to her evaluations of states of affairs, they also suggest that it may be hard to infer normative views directly from choice behaviour.

A striking recent development in public economics, reflecting this difficulty, has been the increasing use of data on people's normative attitudes obtained with surveys or questionnaires. For example, views about distributive justice and redistributive policy have been examined by Fong (2001), Gaertner et al. (2001), Corneo and Grüner (2002), Faravelli (2007), Gaertner and Schwettmann (2007), and Corneo and Fong (2008).[2] In this paper, we extend the empirical investigation of normative views to a different economic context, namely social dilemma (public goods) games, and a different type of normative view, namely moral judgment.[3] More specifically, we report an experiment that, using techniques adapted from moral psychology, explores how people judge the morality of a free rider in a social dilemma game.

A social dilemma arises when members of a group share the benefits of a common resource but each has to decide individually how much to contribute to its provision. Contribution is costly to the contributor but helps all other group members. Thus, a social dilemma isolates a conflict between personal interest, which militates for free riding, and collective interest, which requires contribution. The ubiquity of social dilemmas makes them important for economics and social science; and the conflict of interest they embody makes them potentially fruitful ground for the empirical study of moral judgments. In fact, there are arguments to the effect that the conception of morality itself evolved in response to cooperation problems our ancestors faced.[4]

Previous research has shown that people experience negative emotions towards free riders in social dilemmas and that some are willing to incur costs to punish them.[5] However, little is known about people's moral judgment of free riders. Although it seems that many people dislike free riders when directly affected by their behaviour, it does not follow that free riding is viewed as *morally* reprehensible. Croson and Konow (2009) provide evidence of a difference between normative judgments reached from the standpoints of "stakeholder" and impartial observer in dictator games; and the same difference could apply in social dilemmas. We ask: when judgment is not confounded with self-interest from being an affected party, is free

☆ Paper submitted for Special Issue: Sen's 75th — New Directions in Welfare.

* Corresponding author. School of Economics, Sir Clive Granger Building, University Park, Nottingham NG7 2RD, United Kingdom. Tel.: +44 115 8466132.
E-mail address: simon.gaechter@nottingham.ac.uk (S. Gächter).

[1] See, for example, the essays collected in Sen (1982a, 2002).

[2] See Konow (2003) and Gaertner (2009) for overviews.

[3] Moral judgments can be "defined as evaluations (good versus bad) of the actions or character of a person that are made with respect to a set of virtues held to be obligatory by a culture or subculture" (Haidt (2001), p. 817).

[4] E.g. Ridley (1996), Binmore (2005), Hauser (2006), Gintis et al. (2008), Krebs (2008).

[5] E.g. Fehr and Gächter (2000, 2002), Fehr and Fischbacher (2004), Cubitt et al. (2008), Gächter and Herrmann (2009).

0047-2727/$ – see front matter © 2010 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.
doi:10.1016/j.jpubeco.2010.10.011

riding still judged to be wrong? And, if so, what factors influence how severe a transgression it is seen as?

In our study, subjects ($n=538$) were confronted with hypothetical scenarios involving a two-player public goods game in which one player free rides. For each scenario, subjects were asked to express their positive or negative moral rating of the free rider, without themselves being involved in the decision situation. As they were merely observers, their judgments should represent impartial moral evaluations.

Our experimental design manipulates three aspects of the scenarios. First, we manipulate the behaviour of the non-judged player to see whether subjects' moral judgments of the free rider depend on this. Our second manipulation investigates how moral judgments depend on the order of moves in the scenarios. In particular, we explore whether the sensitivity of judgments of the free rider to the action of the non-judged player is affected by whether the free rider knew the other player's behaviour when choosing his own. Third, we explore whether moral judgments are sensitive to contextual cues provided by the framing of the decision problem. The framing manipulation we study has a Give versus Take form. This manipulation is common in studies of social dilemma games,[6] but its impact on moral judgments in that context has not been studied before, to our knowledge.

We find that free riding is perceived as a morally blameworthy action in all our scenarios, except for one case in which it is seen as morally praiseworthy. The exceptional case is the one, which we will call "ratting on a rat", in which the judged free rider moves second, after observing that the other player has free ridden too. We provide evidence that, irrespective of whether moves are simultaneous or sequential, the higher is the other player's contribution, the more negative is the moral rating assigned to the free rider on average. Interestingly, this pattern of judgments is also observed at an individual level for a substantial minority of subjects in the simultaneous case and for an overwhelming majority in the sequential case. Finally, we find a strong framing effect in moral evaluations: other things equal, subjects condemn withdrawing support from the public good less than the corresponding equivalent action of failing to contribute to it.

We see these findings as a contribution not just to economics but also to the emerging literature in moral psychology and empirical moral philosophy (Haidt, 2001; Nichols, 2004, Haidt 2007, Nado et al. 2009). This literature investigates how people arrive at moral judgments in a number of contexts. By extending it to cover free riding in social dilemmas, we make a contribution that is both conceptual and empirical. We analyse a typical experimental social dilemma problem from the perspectives of two accounts of how people form moral judgments: the reason-based model and the emotion-based model. Although our experimental design is not intended to test between those models, each model provides a distinct framework for analysing how our experimental manipulations may affect moral judgments. We explain this in Section 3, after describing our main design features in Section 2. Section 4 gives details of experimental procedures. Finally, Section 5 presents, and Section 6 discusses, our empirical results.[7]

2. Experimental design: scenarios and treatments

In our experiment, each subject responded to a questionnaire requiring her to report her moral judgment of a player in hypothetical scenarios. There were four treatments, each defined by a different questionnaire. Each subject responded to the questionnaire for one treatment only.

Each questionnaire described a decision problem for two fictitious players, named Person A and Person B; and then gave some possible endings, each of which specified players' choices and their consequences. A *scenario* comprises a description of a decision problem and an ending. Each questionnaire consisted of five scenarios with the same decision problem, but different endings.

In all scenarios, the players were the two members of a group playing a public good game. Within each questionnaire, the behaviour of Person A varied across scenarios but Person B was always a complete free rider. After each ending, the subject was asked, as a detached observer, to rate the morality of Person B on a scale ranging from −50 (extremely bad) to +50 (extremely good). Thus, in each treatment, we can test within-subjects for the impact of the behaviour of the non-judged player on the moral rating assigned to the free rider. All other tests are between-subjects and involve comparisons of subjects' responses across treatments.

There were two treatment variables: the framing used to describe the decision problem; and the order of moves in that problem. Each variable had two possible values: "Give" and "Take" for framing; and "Simultaneous" and "Sequential" for order of moves. Each was manipulated independently, yielding four treatments: Give-Simultaneous, Take-Simultaneous, Give-Sequential, and Take-Sequential.

To explain the Give versus Take manipulation, we fix on the Simultaneous order of moves. In the Give frame, the decision facing each player was how much to contribute to a group project; in the Take frame, it was how much to withdraw. The first scenarios in the Give-Simultaneous and Take-Simultaneous treatments are shown in the left-hand and right-hand columns below respectively. (To show the difference between them, we present corresponding Give and Take scenarios side by side here, using bold face for each phrase which differs from the corresponding one in the other framing. However, bold face was not used for these passages when scenarios were presented to subjects and, as explained above, no subject saw both frames).

Give-Simultaneous	Take-Simultaneous
Imagine a group that consists of two group members, Person A and Person B. ***Each group member receives an endowment of 20 tokens and*** *has to decide* ***how many tokens to keep*** *for himself and how many to* ***contribute to a*** *group project. Each token he keeps for himself has a value of one pound for him. Each token* ***contributed to*** *the group project has a value of £1.50 to the project. The total value of the project is divided equally between the two group members. So, each token* ***contributed to*** *the project earns both group members £0.75 each. The total income of a group member is the sum earned from tokens* ***kept for*** *himself and his share of the earnings of the group project. Each group member decides simultaneously, that is, without knowing what the other one has done.* *A) Assume that Person A* ***contributes 0*** *tokens to the group project and Person B* ***contributes 0*** *tokens to the group project. Therefore, the value of the group project is £0 and, thus, as a result of their* ***contributions****, Person A's total income is £20 and Person B's total income is £20.*	*Imagine a group that consists of two group members, Person A and Person B.* ***There are 40 tokens in a group project.*** *Each group member has to decide* ***how many, up to a maximum of 20, of these tokens to withdraw*** *for himself and how many to leave in the group project. Each token he* ***withdraws*** *for himself has a value of one pound for him. Each token* ***left in*** *the group project has a value of £1.50 to the project. The total value of the project is divided equally between the two group members. So, each token left in the project earns both group members £0.75 each. The total income of a group member is the sum earned from tokens* ***withdrawn*** *by himself and his share of the earnings of the group project. Each group member decides simultaneously, that is, without knowing what the other one has done.* *A) Assume that Person A* ***withdraws 20*** *tokens from the group project and Person B* ***withdraws*** *20 tokens from the group project. Therefore, the value of the group project is £0 and, thus, as a result of their* ***withdrawals****, Person A's total income is £20 and Person B's total income is £20.*

The scenarios within each questionnaire differed from each other only in Person A's behaviour. In the Give-Simultaneous treatment,

[6] See, for example, Brewer and Kramer (1986), McDaniel and Sistrunk (1991), Andreoni (1995), McCusker and Carnevale (1995), Sell and Son (1997), Sonnemans et al. (1998); Park (2000), van Dijk and Wilke (2000), Rege and Telle (2004) and Dufwenberg et al. (2010).

[7] For readers more interested in the empirical contribution than the conceptual one, it is possible to skip or skim Section 3, though doing so carries a cost in terms of understanding parts of Section 6.

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/969779

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/969779

Daneshyari.com