Course Assistant for Econ 1436: Economics and Morality

Prof. Ben Enke is looking for a course assistant for Econ 1436: Economics and Morality. The class is empirical in nature and covers the intersections of research on morality, politics, and economics. Responsibilities of the course assistant will include a subset of:

- Teaching 1-2 sections on a bi-weekly basis, 10 hrs a week, $19/hour
- Grading problem sets and exams
- Holding office hours to help students with data analyses in Stata

Course assistants must have a solid background in Stata and must be able to document the ability to implement simple analyses (regressions, figures, maps etc) on the fly. Basic econometrics skills are also required.

Students who are interested in assisting with the course are asked to submit a CV that clearly explains relevant econometrics and Stata skills, as well as a transcript. Applications should be sent to enke@fas.harvard.edu ASAP.
ECON1436: Economics and Morality

Fall 2019
Harvard University

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Teaching Fellow:
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Hours:
- Class: Tuesday / Thursday, 10:30-11:45 am; Sever 213 (FAS)
- Sections: Tuesday 5:00-6:15 pm, Thursday 9:00-10:15 am; Room TBD
- Office hours Ben: Thursday 2:30-4:30 pm. Schedule on my website. Please make sure to sign up for an “Economics and Morality” slot rather than a graduate student slot
- Office hours Ambra: Wednesday 8:30-9:45 am. Schedule a 15 minutes slot using the link https://my.timetrade.com/book/PZM9N

Prerequisites for enrollment: None

Course overview:

Questions related to morality pervade the economic and political discourse. However, traditionally, economists have paid little attention to the structure and consequences of people’s moral concerns. This course introduces students to research in an emerging field that studies the determinants and consequences of heterogeneity in moral reasoning through the lens of economics. The main objective of the class is to highlight (i) how moral reasoning matters for economic and political outcomes, and (ii) how economic needs in turn generate particular moral systems. To understand the bidirectional relationship between economics and morality, we will study questions such as: What is the difference between universalistic and relational approaches to moral reasoning, and how do these matter for economics? How do Americans’ moral intuitions vary across space and over time? What is the role of moral values in U.S. presidential elections, or for policy preferences related to redistribution or the military? What are people’s fairness views on distributive justice in light of increasing inequality and low social mobility? What are the functional economic origins of morality? How and why are moral systems culturally variable? How do economic incentives, institutional features, or social networks shape morality? From a methodological viewpoint, the class uses empirical techniques to study morality-related concepts and ideas from psychology and anthropology.
Methods and course format:

The course focuses on discussing empirical research. This is not a class in philosophy or ethical reasoning. Thus, the class provides basic training in the standard empirical toolbox of economists: regression analysis with large-scale datasets, lab experiments, field experiments, surveys, and text analysis. Students are not expected to be familiar with the tools mentioned above, but they are expected to be willing to learn them to some extent. The class is lecture-based.

Course assignments and grading:

- Five problem sets (9% each)
- In-class group presentations of an empirical project (20%)
- Final exam (30%)
- In almost all classes, we offer quiz questions which count towards the final grade. You receive 5% if you participate in 90% of all quizzes, and nothing otherwise.

Course Policies

- I am committed to offering an entertaining class that will hopefully change the way you look at and think about the world. I invest a lot of effort into teaching. I hence expect that students are active and contribute to class discussions.
- In case of excess demand for the course, we will lottery the slots.
- Late assignments will receive a 25% deduction for each 24 hours delay.
- I strongly discourage students from bringing laptops or other electronic devices such as iPads to class. A lot of evidence shows that these inhibit learning and active participation. If you still feel like you have to bring your device, you need to register this with me at the beginning of the second week of class, and all students who bring laptops will be seated in a separate part of the classroom.
- We take attendance on those days on which our world-class guest lecturers contribute their precious time to our learning experience. Unexcused no-shows on such days receive a 1% deduction on the final exam.
- Otherwise we do not take attendance, though note that we offer quiz questions at the end of each class that count towards your final grade.

Accommodations for students with disabilities

Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with me by the end of the second week of the term. All discussions will remain confidential, although Faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation.
Problem sets
- There will be a total of five problem sets
- These will be relatively short assignments where you apply the ideas and concepts from class to specific problems
- The problem sets will partly ask you to conduct some empirical analyses on morality-related concepts

Empirical group project
- We will randomly form groups of 2-4 students, depending on class size
- We will upload datasets that include both moral and economic/political variables. You are welcome to use some of the other datasets that you will come across in section instead, if you like
- You then need to think about which types of questions could be asked and answered with these datasets
- Your output will consist of a paper (jointly written) that is up to six pages long, excluding cover page and references
- The write-up should contain:
  - An explanation of the research question
  - A description of how the empirical analysis tackles those questions
  - A summary of the empirical results, potentially including output that summarizes the results (such as tables or figures)
- Students will jointly present the results of their project in class
Course outline:

PART I: HETEROGENEITY IN MORALITY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Weeks 1—2: Foundations

Guiding questions: What are different dimensions of morality? How can we measure them in surveys, experimental games, or online tools? How would you program a self-driving car?

9/3 Course overview
9/5 Conceptualizing and Measuring Morality using Economic and Psychological Tools
9/10 Me vs. You: Experiments on Moral Wiggle Room and Diffusion of Responsibility
9/12 Cognition and Moral Reasoning
   Guest lecture by Fiery Cushman, Harvard Psychology Department

Weeks 3—4: Us vs. Them: Moral Universalism

Guiding questions: What is the core of the philosophical debates between moral universalists and communitarians? Empirically, how does Americans’ universalism vary across individuals and space? How has universalism changed over time and how does this relate to the “loss of community” in the U.S.?

9/17 In-Group Favoritism, Communitarianism, and Universalism
9/19 Moral Universalism in the United States I: Individual-Level Heterogeneity
9/24 Moral Universalism in the United States II: Variation Over Time and Across Space

Weeks 4—6: Moral Universalism and Politics

Guiding questions: How do moral values affect voting behavior? How do politicians cater to the moral needs of their constituents? Which moral concerns drive support for specific policies? Do Conservatives and Liberals exhibit different patterns of giving, and why?

9/26 Moral Values in U.S. Presidential Elections
10/1 The Geography of Us versus Them
   Guest lecture by Ryan Enos, Harvard Government Department
10/3 Moral Universalism and the Structure of Political Ideology
10/8 Immigration, Cultural Backlash, and Political Decision-Making
Guest lecture by Marco Tabellini, Harvard Business School

Weeks 6—7: Distributive Justice: Lab Experiments and Political Implications

Guiding questions: What are key facts about the national income distribution and social mobility? What are leading theories of distributive justice? Which principles of distributive justice do most people actually believe in, and which types of inequalities are they willing to accept? How does this vary across countries? What determines people’s support for redistribution?

10/10 Distributive Justice and Redistribution I
10/15 Distributive Justice and Redistribution II
10/17 Digression: Motivated Reasoning and Prosocial Behavior
Guest lecture by Christine Exley, Harvard Business School

Weeks 8: Student Presentations of Empirical Group Projects

10/22 Student presentations I
10/24 Student presentations II

PART II: ECONOMIC, CULTURAL, AND INSTITUTIONAL DETERMINANTS OF MORALITY

Weeks 9—10: Cultural Variation and Evolutionary Origins of Morality

Guiding questions: Why do people have such strong feelings about “right” and “wrong” in the first place? Is morality functional and serves an economic purpose? How do cultures differ in the types of moral reasoning they emphasize? How does historical heterogeneity in family systems affect the structure of morality? What are moralizing gods?

10/29 Moralizing Gods and the Evolutionary Origins of Morality
10/31 Cultural Variation in Moral Reasoning
11/5 The Role of Kinship Systems
Weeks 10—12: Institutional and Economic Determinants of Prosociality and Values

Guiding questions: How and why do human institutions like markets or religion shape people’s moral concerns? Do political outcomes feed back into people’s moral views? How does parental and non-parental upbringing affect prosociality?

11/7 The Effects of Religious Institutions

11/12 The Effects of Mixing Rich and Poor Kids on Prosocial Behavior  
*Guest lecture by Gautam Rao, Harvard Economics Department*

11/14 Peer Effects: Mentoring Programs, Early Education and Election Outcomes

11/19 The Psychological Effects of Propaganda in Authoritarian Regimes  
*Guest lecture by David Yang, Harvard Economics Department*

11/21 Morality and Market Integration

Weeks 13-14: Finishing up

11/26 Review: Key themes and exam prep

11/28 No class: Thanksgiving

12/3 Q&A

TBA Final exam
Tentative section outline

Week 1: No sections

Weeks 2—3: Basic Statistical Tools

Guiding question: What are basic statistics concepts that I will need for this class?

Note: You need to attend only one of the sections on 9/10 or 9/19. They cover the same material.

9/10, 9/11 Summary statistics of one variable: mean, median, standard deviation, cumulative distribution function, probability density function → How can we use this information to learn about one variable of interest? Relationship between variables: correlation coefficient, joint distribution and marginal distributions

Weeks 4: Stata Tutorial

Guiding question: how do we use STATA to implement what we have learnt last section?

9/24, 9/26 Learn STATA commands that allow you to produce the summary statistics of a variable and to study the relationships between two variables (plus graphs).

Week 5: Regression Analyses of Morality-Related Concepts I

Guiding question: what is a regression and how can I use it to learn from the data?

10/1, 10/3 Introduction of regression coefficient and definition of covariates. Golden rule of covariates (when to include them and what?). Stata intro to regressions, how to run a regression in STATA and how to interpret the results, scatter plot and regression line.

Week 6: Regression Analyses of Morality-Related Concepts II

Guiding question: How do moral attitudes in the World Values Survey correlate with socio-demographics and political attitudes, or with country-level variables?

10/8, 10/10 Introduction to World Values Survey, regression analysis, constructing figures and maps.

Additional sections TBA
**Problem set outline**

Note: Due dates refer to 11:59 pm of a day.

1\(^{st}\) PS: Distributed 9/10; Due 9/23

2\(^{nd}\) PS: Distributed 9/24; Due 9/30

3\(^{rd}\) PS: Distributed 10/1; Due 10/7

Empirical project: Distributed 10/8; Write-up due 10/21 (presentations on 10/22 and 10/24)

4\(^{th}\) PS: Distributed 10/29; Due 11/4

5\(^{th}\) PS: Distributed 11/12; Due 11/25
Readings

There is no textbook. As general readings I recommend the following books that touch upon some of the themes that we cover in class:


Weeks 1—2: Foundations


Week 3: Moral Universalism


Weeks 4—6: Moral Universalism and Politics


Weeks 6—7: Distributive Justice


**Weeks 9-10: Cross-Cultural Heterogeneity and Evolutionary Origins of Morality**


Weeks 10—12: Institutional and Economic Determinants of Prosociality and Values

Religion:


Social networks and peer effects:


Markets:

