

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Applicant

Ing. Miloš Fišar, Ph.D.

Habilitation thesis

Understanding Human Behavior in Economic Contexts: Experimental Evidence on Social Preferences and Decision-Making

Reviewer

Assoc. Prof. Jaromír Kovářík, Ph.D.

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I would like to make clear from the outset that I believe Miloš Fišar's habilitation thesis adheres to international standards for the position he seeks. The various components of the thesis demonstrate high-quality research, as evidenced by their publication in prestigious, high-impact international journals. The quality of the chapters reflects that the applicant is a mature and competitive researcher in his field. Furthermore, the thesis employs a methodology that surpasses the typical standards of research in the Czech Republic. The research topic is highly relevant, actively studied by leading researchers, and generates meaningful policy implications. The thesis comprises three scientific articles, unified by their methodological approach and thematic focus. All three articles employ experimental methodologies, utilizing either online or laboratory experiments. The unifying theme is the exploration of the determinants and correlates of prosocial behaviors, such as sharing, cooperation, and trust.

Chapter 1 provides a unifying experimental framework for analyzing dictator giving under loss framing. It convincingly demonstrates that, while different loss framings generate the same intensity of emotional responses, they lead to distinct behavioral responses that are consistent with the "do-no-harm" principle. This principle reflects individuals' reluctance to impose harm on others, even when it benefits them personally. Importantly for the robustness, the findings hold regardless of whether the dictators earn their endowment or not. The study highlights the significant influence of framing on human decisions and helps reconcile contrasting findings in previous literature on the impact loss framing in the Dictator Game.

Chapter 2 examines how donors' trust and willingness to coordinate charitable contributions through intermediaries are influenced by two factors: the level of discretion intermediaries have in allocating funds and the presence of overhead costs. The key findings are the following. When intermediaries are required to allocate a high percentage (80%) of funds to public goods donations, coordination, and public goods funding success are boosted, whereas overhead costs significantly reduce donors' willingness to transfer funds to intermediaries. The study concludes that donors' perceptions of fairness and efficiency, especially concerning overhead costs, are critical for successful coordination of donations. As the implications, the study, first, highlights the importance of trust in encouraging donations. Charities that focus on transparency and direct most funds (e.g., 80%) toward public goods can attract more donors and improve coordination. Second, it shows that high overhead costs discourage donations, suggesting charities need to justify these costs clearly and show how they contribute to their mission. Third, it emphasizes the value of effective rules. Strict limits on overhead spending build trust, while weak rules are less effective. Practical advice for charities includes minimizing unnecessary costs, maintaining transparency, and aligning spending with donor expectations to boost contributions.

Chapter 3 investigates the impact of hormonal fluctuations during the menstrual cycle on economic decision-making. Specifically, it tests whether ovulatory shifts, characterized by hormonal changes like increased estradiol and testosterone, affect behaviors such as risk-taking, rule violations, and exploratory decision-making. Laboratory experiments were conducted with 124 naturally cycling women and a control group of 47 men. Behavioral tasks included risk elicitation, rule-violation assessments, and foraging simulations, alongside hormonal measurements through saliva and hair samples. The results reveal no significant behavioral differences across menstrual cycle phases. Women did not exhibit increased risk-taking, dishonesty, or exploratory tendencies during ovulation compared to menstruation. These findings challenge the ovulatory shift hypothesis, which posits behavioral changes aligned with evolutionary theories about reproductive strategies. The study also found minimal gender differences, with slightly lower exploratory behaviors observed among women. The research highlights the need to revisit assumptions about hormonal influences, focusing beyond mating-related behaviors.

In conclusion, Miloš Fišar's habilitation thesis exemplifies rigorous and impactful research, addressing complex behavioural phenomena through robust experimental methods. It offers valuable contributions to understanding prosocial behaviours and challenges prevailing assumptions about hormonal influences on decision-making, underscoring its relevance and applicability in both academic and policy contexts.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence:

Since all the work is already published, I only have a few questions and comments:

1. Chapter 2: This is my long-term question regarding framing: have you thought about a general rule predicting when framing has an effect and when it does not? Is it possible to generalize framing effects and incorporate them into theoretical models? I am sincerely sceptical in this points, but who knows.
2. Chapter 2: Given that the level of discretion different intermediaries have in allocating funds likely varies in real-world scenarios, have you considered a treatment where intermediaries differ in the level of discretion? If your current conclusions are correct, donors should prefer intermediaries with higher restrictions, and this preference could act as a natural coordination mechanism.
3. Chapter 3: What do you see as the key implications of your findings for the broader literature? How do your findings advance our understanding of economic behaviours in relation to hormonal fluctuations?
4. Chapter 3: How does the study of menstrual cycles and their hormonal correlations relate to the literature on prenatal hormones (typically measured by the 2D:4D digit ratio) to which I have contributed partially? While early studies find strong associations, more recent contributions rather report null results—similar to your findings in Chapter 3. This is one reason why I moved away from this research line, but I'd value your perspective as someone actively engaged with these topics.
5. Is not the number of observations in Chapter 3 too low to make meaningful inferences? What is the standard in this literature?

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled *Understanding Human Behavior in Economic Contexts: Experimental Evidence on Social Preferences and Decision-Making* by Ing. Miloš Fišar, Ph.D. **fulfils** the requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Economics.

Date: Jan. 14, 2025

Signature: