

Abstract

We study indirect reciprocity and strategic reputation building in an experimental helping game. At any time only half of the subjects can build a reputation. This allows us to study both pure indirect reciprocity that is not contaminated by strategic reputation building and the impact of incentives for strategic reputation building on the helping rate. We find that pure indirect reciprocity exists, but also that the helping decisions are substantially affected by strategic considerations. Finally, we find that strategic do better than non-strategic players and non-reciprocal do better than reciprocal players, casting doubt on previously proposed evolutionary explanations for indirect reciprocity.

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