

[Slides, starting with Altruism](#)

This course will meet Tues/Thurs from 3pm-4:15pm (barring an unlikely change due to room scheduling)

Live Q&A changed to Tuesday, August 24 at 11am

Join Zoom meeting

<https://harvard.zoom.us/j/91827207943>

About the course

Highlights

In this course we'll use a brilliant tool from economics to uncover the hidden explanations for a diverse array of puzzling social behaviors (focused on humans, but also including some animal examples). Why do people use innuendo, when they could just speak directly? Why do people give generously to charity with little attention to impact? Why is it often considered "tacky" to discuss our accomplishments? Why do people get involved in deadly vengeance feuds over seemingly trivial disputes, like a pig getting into a neighbor's garden? After raising these and many more questions, we'll answer them using game theory, a tool that starts with simple, logical assumptions, but often reveals counterintuitive conclusions.

Format and Assignments

This is a lecture course with substantial student engagement during class. If enrollment is large we will add discussion sections so that students have the opportunity to discuss the material in a more intimate setting.

The assignments for this class are writing-heavy and focus on analyzing and testing the insights from the game theory models for explaining puzzling social behavior.

See [the syllabus](#) for more details about course topics and assignments.

About me

I have a long history at Harvard--I earned my undergraduate degree here in psychology, and my PhD in social psychology working with Professor Daniel Gilbert (some of you may know Professor Gilbert from taking his version of Introduction to Psychology,). I have since been a post doctoral researcher at Harvard, and this is my fifth year teaching courses here! I love the Harvard community, and look forward to connecting with a new group of students this fall.

I teach two courses in Human Evolutionary Biology: this course, and a course on how hidden incentives explain art and beauty. I also teach three courses in the Psychology Department: a course examining functional (evolutionary) explanations for classic social psychological phenomena, a course on the origins of our political and moral ideologies, and a course on the psychology of cults.

My courses are inspired by my research, which integrates evolutionary game theory with laboratory experiments to study the hidden incentives that shape our preferences, beliefs, and ideologies, including our sense of morality, justice, beauty, and altruism. My research and courses draw on tools and evidence from multiple fields, including economics, history, philosophy, and studies of cultural evolution, with a particular emphasis on psychological research and using psychological experiments to test theory.

You can see me speak about some of my research here:

[Tedx Cambridge Talk](#)

For more on me, here is [my website](#).