

Statement of Research

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My fields of interest are Behavioral and Experimental Economics within the scope of Development Economics. I focus on the study of the efficacy and the efficiency of policy interventions for poverty alleviation with a social component in developing countries. The bulk of my research to date has concentrated on evaluating the impact of monetary incentives on individual behavior that enhances the common good within a community or group. Additionally, I have explored applications of experimental economics in the field, in particular understanding economic decision-making by low income populations in order to enhance the efficiency of social interventions. Early childhood education for the poor and leadership are the two main areas of application.

Some of the mechanisms through which social forces are at work in economic decision-making are social norms, cooperation, reciprocity and trust. In my job market paper [Disentangling Social Capital: Lab-in-the-Field Evidence on Coordination, Cooperation and Networks](#) I conducted and designed an artefactual field experiment that included economic experiments that measure cooperation, social norms and individual connections in order to capture the effect of a Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) program on prosocial behavior.

In my current projects I evaluate the effects of a workfare program on individual and household behavior, explore the role of heterogeneity of pro-social preferences on designing the most efficient economic incentive, and identify unobserved heterogeneity of other-regarding preferences within the population.

I am convinced that successful applied research is based on rigorous theoretical foundations. The main problem I see our western society faces is a social norm that perceives the human person as an object, a knave and a self-regarding payoff-maximizing individual that lives in isolation. I am also aware that mainstream economics not only is facing a methodological crisis but also a philosophical one. I am fortunate to see that this is far from being the status quo¹.

I have now completed my two PhD degrees in Economics, one from University College London and one from University of Siena. Having worked under different faculty and in different academic communities has allowed me to develop a rich research agenda.

I have ten years of experience in conducting large-scale economic experiments in the lab and in the field. Although my work is empirical, I place a strong emphasis on laying structural foundations to my models. This is especially important given that some of my work interfaces with Behavioral Economics, where the rationale for decision-making becomes the key aspect of the model. I would like my future research to focus on the analysis and design of institutions that promote development and provision of public goods.

¹ See <http://www.core-econ.org/>

I believe successful research in Economics means to be aware that our own religious, political and philosophical view of the human person is present in economic modeling and the nature of public policies and mechanism design. During my joint research with Sam Bowles I understood that my *Aristotelian* view of humanity could be useful in these postmodern times². In our article *Economic incentives and social preferences: substitutes or complements* we show that incentives designed for ‘knaves’, not necessarily make good citizens.

I think this seminar is the best opportunity to find the common ground between my research and my beliefs. I am eager to learn the applications of the principles of Catholic social thought to economics. Having attended a talk by Mary Hirschfeld at DSPT in Berkeley last year I was excited to see that this is possible. In addition, I also like Prof. Yuengert’s work on how it is important for economists to consider the common good when designing policies.

Having a strong background in Economic Analysis and Public Policy with a special interest in Development Economics and aiming to engage my future research work with the Catholic intellectual tradition, I feel I am a good candidate for this seminar.

² Aristotle recognized the cultivation of civic virtue not only as an indicator of good government but also as its essential foundation. “Legislators make the citizens good by inculcating habits in them, ...It is in this that a good constitution differs from a bad one.” (Aristotle, 1962) Aristotle. 1962. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Martin Ostwald. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill