THOMAS NEUBER

Bonn Graduate School of Economics, Kaiserstr. 1, 53113 Bonn, Germany

☎ +49 228 94735204   ✉ thomas.neuber@uni-bonn.de   🌐 https://thomas-neuber.github.io/

EDUCATION

PhD in economics   *October 2014 – June 2021 (expected)*
Bonn Graduate School of Economics, University of Bonn, Germany
Advisors: Thomas Dohmen (primary), Armin Falk, and Felipe Valencia Caicedo

Master in economics (MSc)   *October 2014 – September 2018*
University of Bonn, Germany

Bachelor in economics (BSc)   *April 2011 – August 2014*
University of Munich (LMU), Germany

Abroad semester   *September 2013 – March 2014*
University of Washington, Seattle, WA

AFFILIATIONS

Research assistant   *since June 2017*
briq – Institute on Behavior & Inequality, Bonn, Germany

Research fellow   *since January 2018*
Collaborative Research Center (CRC) TR 224, Universities of Bonn and Mannheim, Germany

Research fellow   *since October 2018*
Institute for Applied Microeconomics, University of Bonn

Student in the *Young ECONtribute Program*   *since April 2020*
ECONtribute: Markets & Public Policy (cluster in the German Excellence Strategy)

TEACHING AND RESEARCH FIELDS

Primary fields: Applied microeconomics, behavioral economics
Secondary field: Applied econometrics

REFERENCES

1. **Thomas Dohmen**
   Professor at the University of Bonn
   Institute for Applied Microeconomics
   Adenauerallee 24–42
   53012 Bonn, Germany
   ☎ +49 228 73-9238
   ✉ t.dohmen@uni-bonn.de

2. **Armin Falk**
   Professor at the University of Bonn
   Institute on Behavior & Inequality
   Schaumburg-Lippe-Strasse 5–9
   53113 Bonn, Germany
   ☎ +49 228 3894-701
   ✉ armin.falk@briq-institute.org

3. **Felipe Valencia Caicedo**
   Assistant Professor at the University of British Columbia
   Vancouver School of Economics
   6000 Iona Drive
   Vancouver BC V6T 1L4, Canada
   ☎ +1 604-827-0004
   ✉ felipe.valencia@ubc.ca

4. **Philipp Strack**
   Associate Professor at Yale University
   Department of Economics
   Yale University
   PO Box 208268
   New Haven CT 06520-8268, USA
   ☎ +1 203-432-6158
   ✉ philipp.strack@gmail.com

Egocentric Norm Adoption
Job market paper

Social norms pervade human interaction, but their demands are often in conflict. To understand behavior, it is thus crucial to know how individuals resolve normative tradeoffs. This paper proposes that sincere judgments about the relative importance of conflicting norms are shaped by personal interest. We show that people tend to follow norms from which they benefit themselves, even in contexts where their own decisions only affect others. In a (virtual) laboratory experiment, each subject makes two decisions over allocations of points within a group of two other participants. The sets of possible allocations entail different normative tradeoffs, and subjects have no personal stakes in their own decisions. However, they are affected by others' decisions: each subject is part of a group, and the members of different groups simultaneously decide over others' allocations along a circle. We find that subjects' decisions are biased towards the normative principles aligned with their own interests, thereby favoring other players whenever these share those interests. Subjects' beliefs about the choices made by others suggest a largely unconscious mechanism. Moreover, survey answers indicate that the effects are driven by self-centered reasoning: subjects who report pronounced perspective-taking are less biased.

Diffusion of Being Pivotal and Immoral Outcomes
(with Armin Falk and Nora Szech)
Review of Economic Studies, Volume 87, Issue 5, October 2020, Pages 2205–2229

We study how the diffusion of being pivotal affects immoral outcomes. In our main experiment, subjects decide about agreeing to kill mice and receiving money versus objecting to the killing and foregoing the monetary amount. In a baseline condition, subjects decide individually about the life of one mouse. In the main treatment, subjects are organized into groups of eight and decide simultaneously. Eight mice are killed if at least one subject opts for killing. The fraction of subjects agreeing to kill is significantly higher in the main condition compared with the baseline condition. In a second experiment, we run the same baseline and main conditions but use a charity context and additionally study sequential decision-making. We replicate our finding from the mouse paradigm. We further show that the observed effects increase with experience, i.e., when we repeat the experiment for a second time. For both experiments, we elicit beliefs about being pivotal, which we validate in a treatment with non-involved observers. We show that beliefs are a main driver of our results.

Motivated by Others' Preferences? An Experiment on Imperfect Empathy
(with Jana Hofmeier)
CRC TR 224 Discussion Paper No. 096

People care about others. But how do they assess the utility of others when making other-regarding decisions? Do they apply their own preferences or do they adopt the preferences of the other person? We study this question in a laboratory experiment where subjects in the role of senders can pay money to avoid harm arising to receivers. In a first step, we elicit all subjects' willingness to pay (WTP) for not having to eat food items containing dried insects. We then show senders the WTPs of receivers and repeat the elicitation procedure, but now with receivers having to eat the food items and senders stating their WTPs to spare the receivers from having to eat them. We find that not only receivers' preferences matter for decisions but also senders' own preferences, a phenomenon for which we use the term imperfect empathy. In motivating prosocial transfers, senders' and receivers' WTPs act as complements by reinforcing each other. Conversely, pairs of sender and receiver who are dissimilar generate lower transfers than others. Since transfers usually benefit receivers more than they cost senders, we also find that dissimilarity within pairs reduces welfare. Our results complement the extensive literature on prosocial preferences, which so far abstracts from heterogeneous valuations. The implications might be far-reaching. For example, systematic differences in consumption preferences between net payers and recipients could undermine public support for public welfare systems.

Limited Self-knowledge and Survey Response Behavior
(with Armin Falk and Philipp Strack)
Working paper

We study response behavior in surveys and show how the explanatory power of self-reports can be improved. First, we develop a choice model of survey response behavior under the assumption that the respondent has imperfect self-knowledge about her individual characteristics. In panel data, the model predicts that the variance in responses for different characteristics increases in self-knowledge and that the variance for a given characteristic over time is non-monotonic in self-knowledge. Importantly, the ratio of these variances identifies an individual's level of self-knowledge, i.e., the latter can be inferred from observed response patterns. Second, we develop a consistent and unbiased estimator for self-knowledge based on the model. Third, we run an experiment to test the model's main predictions in a context where the researcher knows the true underlying characteristics. The data confirm the model's predictions as well as the estimator's validity. Finally, we turn to a large panel data set, estimate individual levels of self-knowledge, and show that accounting for differences in self-knowledge significantly increases the explanatory power of estimates. Using a median split in self-knowledge and regressing risky behaviors on self-reported risk attitudes, we find that the R^2 can be multiple times larger for above- than below-median subjects. Similarly, gender gaps in risk attitudes are considerably larger when restricting samples to subjects with high self-knowledge. These examples illustrate how using the estimator may improve inference from survey data.

State Institutions and the Evolution of Patience
(with Thomas Dohmen)
Work in progress

The degree to which people behave patiently is a crucial determinant of various economic outcomes at both the individual and the aggregate level. This paper contributes to our understanding of this important economic concept by studying the persistent effect that statehood during the last two millennia has had on patience around the globe. We show that state history and individuals' levels of patient behavior exhibit a humped shaped relationship, consistent with recent findings for the association between historical statehood and economic development. The relationship is robust to various controls, including contemporary institutions and even economic development. We then turn towards identifying the geographically portable component of the effect by comparing migrants from different origins that now reside in the same country. We find a pronounced negative effect of home countries' state history on patient behavior, which is significant and robust to controls. It is shown that our results are consistent with a model where state history has a persistently positive effect on patient behavior through the emergence of patience-promoting norms, which are substitutes for intrinsic patience but not portable. The overall effect of state history on present-day patient behavior masks partial crowding-out of intrinsic patience.

PRESENTATIONS AND SUMMER SCHOOLS

European Winter Meetings of the Econometric Society   *December 2020 (accepted)*
Presented project: "Egocentric Norm Adoption"

CRC TR 224 Conference   *October 2020*
Presented project: "Egocentric Norm Adoption"

Annual Congress of the *Verein für Socialpolitik*   *September 2020*
Presented project: "Limited Self-knowledge and Survey Response Behavior"

Annual Congress of the European Economic Association   *August 2020*
Presented project: "Limited Self-knowledge and Survey Response Behavior"

Early-Career Behavioral Economics Conference   *July 2020*
Presented project: "Motivated by Others' Preferences? An Experiment on Imperfect Empathy"

Annual Congress of the *Verein für Socialpolitik* *September 2019*
Presented project: "Motivated by Others' Preferences? An Experiment on Imperfect Empathy"

Annual Congress of the European Economic Association *August 2019*
Presented project: "Motivated by Others' Preferences? An Experiment on Imperfect Empathy"

Conference of the Society for Economic Measurement *August 2019*
Presented project: "Limited Self-knowledge and Survey Response Behavior"

CRC TR 224 Conference *April 2019*
Presented project: "Motivated by Others' Preferences? An Experiment on Imperfect Empathy"

Spring School in Behavioral Economics *March 2018*
San Diego, CA

The Choice Lab PhD Workshop in Behavioral and Experimental Econ. *August 2017*
Presented project: "State Institutions and the Evolution of Patience"

briq Summer School in Behavioral Economics *July 2017*
briq – Institute on Behavior & Inequality

GRANTS AND HONORS

Research grant by the CRC TR 224 *March 2020*
Funding of €4.000 for the project "Egocentric Norm Adoption" (within Project A01)

Research grant by the CRC TR 224 *May 2018*
Funding of €4.000 for the project "Motivated by Others' Preferences? An Experiment on Imperfect Empathy" (within Project A01)

Doctoral scholarship *October 2014 – September 2018*
Bonn Graduate School of Economics

Munich Honors Program in Economics *April 2012 – August 2014*
University of Munich

PROSA$^{\text{LMU}}$ scholarship *September 2013 – March 2014*
German Academic Exchange Service and University of Munich

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Research module "Behavioral Economics" (undergraduate) *Winter term 2019/20*
Department of Economics, University of Bonn

Research module "Household Economics" (undergraduate) *Summer term 2019*
Department of Economics, University of Bonn

Tutor for statistics (undergraduate) *Winter term 2016/17*
Department of Economics, University of Bonn

Tutor for macroeconomics (undergraduate) *Summer term 2012*
Department of Economics, University of Munich

OTHER

Referee service:	Games and Economic Behavior
Languages:	German (native), English (fluent)
Computer skills:	LaTeX, Mathematica, Python, R, Stata

Last updated on November 21, 2020.