



Are economists more selfish than other ‘social’ scientists? *

DAVID N. LABAND & RICHARD O. BEIL

Department of Economics, Auburn University, Auburn, AL 36849–5242, U.S.A.; e-mail:
labandn@business.auburn.edu

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Abstract. There is considerable professional disagreement among economists about whether economists are less cooperative than non-economists. It has been argued that once an individual has been schooled in the self-interest model of individual human behavior (s)he exhibits more selfish behavior than other, ostensibly similar individuals who have not been taught to fully appreciate *Homo economicus*. Heretofore, the empirical debate has centered around classroom experiments designed to compare the “honesty” of undergraduate economics majors *versus* non economics majors. However, methodological problems have plagued these studies, leaving both sides at an impasse. We offer unique and compelling real-world evidence that suggests economists are no less cooperative than non-economists. Indeed, after comparing the incidence of “cheating” on their Association dues, we find that professional economists are significantly more honest/cooperative than professional political scientists, and especially, professional sociologists.

Economists may be selected for their work by virtue of their preoccupation with the “rational” allocation of money and goods. Or they may start behaving according to the general tenets of the theories they study ...

– Marwell and Ames (1981: 309)

Economists appear to behave less cooperatively than noneconomists along a variety of dimensions.

– Frank, Gilovich, and Regan (1993: 167)

... even if undergraduate students of economics display uncooperative behavior in specialized games or surveys, their “real world” behavior is actually substantially more cooperative than that of their counterparts studying other subjects.

Yezer, Goldfarb, and Poppen (1996: 177)

Both our critics and we are in complete agreement about how economics training affects expectations about behavior in social dilemmas. The only real issue, then, is the empirical question of the extent to which this effect alters actual behavior in social dilemmas.

Frank, Gilovich, and Regan (1996: 187–188)

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1. Introduction

There is considerable professional disagreement among economists about whether economists are more selfish than non-economists. It has been argued that once an individual has been particularly well-schooled in the self-interest model of individual behavior (s)he exhibits more selfish behavior than other, ostensibly similar individuals who have not been taught to fully appreciate *Homo economicus*. The implications of what might be termed the “we become what we have been taught” hypothesis are, without question, truly significant.

Heretofore, the empirical debate has centered around classroom experiments designed to compare the “honesty” of undergraduate economics majors *versus* non economics majors.¹ However, methodological problems have plagued these studies, leaving both sides at an impasse. We offer unique and compelling real-world evidence that suggests that economists are no less honest/cooperative than non-economists. Indeed, after comparing the incidence of “cheating” on their respective professional Association dues, we conclude that economists are significantly more honest/cooperative than professional political scientists and professional sociologists.

2. Review of previous findings

The first attempt to shed empirical light on this issue was by Marwell and Ames (1981). They designed a series of experiments in which participants could play an “individual exchange” strategy or a “group exchange” strategy, using a fixed quantity of tokens *qua* resources. As they described the payoffs to each strategy (1981: 296–297):

Tokens invested in the individual exchange earned a set amount, regardless of the behaviour of other group members or anything else The individual exchange was thus like a bank in assuring a specific return on investment. The return was “excludable” in neither affecting, nor being affected by, returns to other group members.

The group exchange, on the other hand, paid its cash earnings to *all* members of the group by a pre-set formula, regardless of who invested. The subject received a *share* of the return on his own investment in the group exchange (if any), and also the same share of the return on investment of each of the other group members. Thus, the group exchange provided a joint, nonrival, nonexcludable or *public* form of payoff. What made the group exchange a public *good* when compared with the individual exchange, was that it was possible to have the group exchange return

substantially more than the fixed amount set for the individual exchange Under these circumstances, all members of the group would be better off if all the group's resources were invested in the group exchange than if all were invested in the individual exchange. On the other hand, each individual would be best off if s/he invested in the individual exchange while everyone else invested in the group exchange. (*italics as in original*)

Free-riding was defined by Marwell and Ames as playing the individual exchange strategy. In one of their twelve experimental settings, the subjects consisted of 32 first-semester graduate students in economics at the University of Wisconsin. Marwell and Ames (1981: 306–307), reported that:

Economics graduate students contributed only an average of 20% of their resources to the group exchange. They were much more likely to free ride than any of our other groups of subjects One could argue that for this group the strong free rider hypothesis receives some support.

In only one of the other 11 experimental settings that Marwell and Ames structured did the mean percentage of resources in the public good fall below 40%. They suggested that this significant difference in observed behavior between the economics graduate students on the one hand and the non-economics students on the other hand, in a highly-controlled experimental context, could be explained by a selectivity into studying economics and/or by economists living their self-interest model of human behavior. As they (1981: 309) put it:

Economists may be selected for their work by virtue of their preoccupation with the “rational” allocation of money and goods. Or they may start behaving according to the general tenets of the theories they study. Confronted with a situation where others might not behave rationally, they nevertheless behave the way good economic theory predicts.

Carter and Irons (1991) found confirmatory evidence that economists behave differently than non-economists, in an experimental context. They placed college freshmen and senior economics majors and non-economics majors in a simple ultimatum bargaining game and found that the economics students had a lower reservation price than the non-economics students for agreeing to the proposed division of money, and the economics students had a higher proposed amount kept than the non-economics students. These differences

were especially apparent among freshmen, but not among seniors, which Carter and Irons interpreted as support for the Marwell and Ames selectivity conjecture and lack of support for the learning hypothesis. In their words: "Economists are Born, Not Made" (p. 174).

Frank, Gilovich, and Regan (1993) faulted economists on several grounds. First, they reported that college economics professors were much less likely than college professors from a variety of other disciplines to contribute to private charities. They did not, however, report any survey response information with respect to the 576 responses they received to the 1,245 questionnaires they mailed. Second, Frank et al. analyzed the behavior of undergraduate students placed in an experimental prisoner's dilemma setting. They found that the defection rate was significantly higher among economics majors than among nonmajors, even controlling for the possible influences of sex, age, and experimental conditions. Finally, Frank et al. analyzed student responses to two ethical dilemmas posed to students in two introductory microeconomics courses and students in an introductory astronomy course at Cornell University. The ethical dilemmas were posed to the students at the beginning of the fall semester and then again at the end of that semester. At issue was the extent to which the students became "less honest" over the course of the semester, with respect to their response to the two ethical dilemmas. Frank et al. report that the economics students generally showed more movement toward less honest responses than the astronomy students showed, and that the students who were taught microeconomic principles with a game theory emphasis showed greater movement toward less honest responses than did the students who were taught microeconomic principles without the game theory emphasis. In the conclusion to their paper, they issued an utterly astonishing recommendation with respect to teaching the self-interest model of human behavior: "With an eye toward both the social good and the well-being of their own students, economists may wish to stress a broader view of human motivation in their teaching (Frank et al., 1993: 170–171). That is, on behalf of the "social good", we should move beyond the self-interest maximization model of human behavior, notwithstanding the scientific merits of the model.

Yezer, Goldfarb, and Poppen (1996) raise a host of cautions regarding the Frank et al. paper. Rather than relying on answers to hypothetical situations, they designed a "lost-letter" experiment, in which envelopes containing \$10 in cash were left in classrooms, one envelope per classroom. The question of interest was whether advanced undergraduate students majoring in economics would exhibit differential return behavior (cooperation) as compared to advanced undergraduate students from other disciplines. Contrary to the previous studies mentioned, Yezer et al. (1996: 181) observed that:

Of the 32 letters left in economics classes, 18 (56 percent) were returned. Only 10 (31 percent) of the 32 letters left in noneconomics classes were returned. This difference is large in magnitude and statistically significant at the 10 percent level. Contrary to the expectation one would have formed based on the sort of evidence presented by Frank, Gilovich and Regan (1993), this experimental evidence indicates that economics students are far more cooperative than students studying other disciplines.

Yezer et al. (1996) also replicated the Frank et al. (1993) “honesty” survey, using two introductory economics classes and introductory classes in biology and psychology. They did not find confirmatory evidence that exposure to introductory economics decreases cooperativeness.

In their response to Yezer et al., Frank, Gilovich, and Regan (1996) blythely dismiss the counterfactual posed by the results of the “lost-letter” experiment by claiming that the finding of more cooperation among economics students than among noneconomics students was so surprising as to be “akin to a ball rolling unassisted up an inclined plane” (p. 188). Because they agree that the experimental classroom setting may be fraught with alternative interpretation, they are reduced to arguing that their combination of real-world survey results on charitable giving plus the results of their hypothetical prisoner’s dilemma game constitutes more compelling evidence than that presented by Yezer, Goldfarb, and Poppen (1996).

If Frank et al. (1993: 192) truly regard real-world evidence presented by someone other than themselves compelling in this debate, the evidence that we bring to bear simply must cause them to reconsider their conclusions:

... three important points remain clear. First, all parties concede that economics training encourages the view that people are motivated primarily by self-interest. Second, there is clear evidence that this view leads people to expect others to defect in social dilemmas (Marwell and Ames, 1981). Third, there is also clear evidence that when people expect their partners to defect in social dilemmas, they are overwhelmingly likely to defect themselves (Frank, Gilovich, and Regan, 1993: 167). *The logical implications of these three points appear to place a heavy burden of proof on those who insist that economics training does not inhibit cooperation.* (emphasis added)

In our opinion, the points raised by Frank et al. (1993) are overly simplistic, if not misleading. While we do not dispute the theoretical plausibility that an understanding of the self-interest model of individual behavior may lead

people to expect others to defect in social dilemmas, the “clear evidence” in support of such a proposition is thin, at best. This evidence comes entirely from one-shot, two-person games with no learning. Given their ostensibly superior understanding of self-interested behavior, it is also plausible, if not likely, that economics students would move more quickly than noneconomics students to cooperative strategies in a repeat-game context. Moreover, the economics students might play a cooperative strategy more consistently in a repeat-game setting than noneconomics students would.

Social dilemmas also come in multi-person contexts. The classic example is private provision of a public good. We’re certainly willing to concede that economics students are more likely than noneconomics students to understand the free-rider incentives inherent to a multi-party social dilemma such as private provision of a public good. Does this necessarily mean that economics students are more likely than noneconomics students to expect others to defect in social dilemmas? We think not. Individuals who understand the threat posed by free-riding to private provision of public goods also understand that universal cooperation makes everyone better off. This is particularly true if a single defector can change the outcome from provision of the public good to nonprovision of the public good. It may therefore be the case that as the percentage of economists placed in a multi-party social dilemma increases, so does the likelihood of cooperative behavior. We stress that our intent here is only to argue that the evidence upon which Marwell and Ames, Carter and Jones, and Frank et al. base their conclusions is extremely limited.

Finally, as we now show, there no longer is “clear evidence that when people expect their partners to defect in social dilemmas, they are overwhelmingly likely to defect themselves”.

3. Methodological design and findings

3.1. Preliminaries

We have previously reported on the incidence of “cheating” by members of the American Economic Association with respect to their payment of annual association membership dues (Beil and Laband, 1996). In this analysis, we compared AEA-provided information about the distribution of AEA membership by income-based dues payment against the income distribution revealed by 301 respondents (of 500 AEA members surveyed) who voluntarily identified their income by AEA-defined dues category. While we observed some “cheating” on the low-end of the income/dues structure, fully two-

thirds of the highest-income members, which encompasses 80% of the AEA membership, paid the suggested highest annual membership dues.²

As it so happens, both the American Sociological Association and the American Political Science Association have income-based dues structures with no overt enforcement mechanism. That is, dues payment by income is purely voluntary in these two organizations, as it is in the American Economic Association (1993). The membership composition of all three Associations is highly similar – most members are highly educated professionals. A comparison of the incidence of “cheating” with respect to payment of Association dues by professional economists and by professional sociologists and political scientists provides real-world evidence about the relative selfishness of economists.

Indeed, if one believes Frank, Gilovich, and Regan (1993), a comparison of cooperative behavior by professional economists against that of professional sociologists, in particular, should be especially revealing. They argue that, at least in part, economists’ relatively uncooperative behavior (in their experimental settings) results from learning – i.e., the better schooled an individual is with respect to *Homo economicus* the less cooperative (s)he becomes in social dilemma settings. Since members of the American Economic Association typically are among the most highly educated individuals in terms of their familiarity with, and appreciation of, the self-interest model of individual behavior, we can only expect Frank et al. to agree that we are less likely to observe cooperative behavior from AEA members than from any other group of individuals, *ceteris paribus*. Conversely, since professional sociologists are highly educated with respect to the benefits of cooperative behavior in social dilemmas, we should expect that members of the American Sociological Association would be more likely to exhibit cooperative behavior in social dilemmas than most other groups of individuals, *ceteris paribus*.

Aside from the explicit importance attached by Frank et al. (1993) to the possibility that the relatively uncooperative behavior exhibited by economics students in experimental situations is learned rather than “innate”, we have no particular interest in this economics-specific variation of the nature *versus* nurture debate. To us the really important question was framed by Frank et al. (1993: 187–188) as cited at the beginning of this paper:

Both our critics and we are in complete agreement about how economics training affects expectations about behavior in social dilemmas. *The only real issue, then, is the empirical question of the extent to which this effect alters actual behavior in social dilemmas.* (emphasis added)

Unless there is compelling evidence suggesting that individuals who expect others to be uncooperative in social dilemmas behave significantly less cooperative than individuals who expect others to exhibit cooperative behavior in social dilemmas, then the nature *versus* nurture question becomes of trifling importance, if that.

3.2. Data

Elton Hinshaw, Secretary-Treasurer of the American Economic Association, kindly provided us with the distribution of AEA members by category of dues payment. Student and family memberships are excluded from the figures in Table 1. As we noted in our previous paper: “The recorded distribution of dues payment will accurately reflect the true distribution of income across AEA members only if individuals pay dues in accordance with their income”. In this large numbers setting, with no monitoring or enforcement that we are aware of, the free-rider incentive looms large, especially among highly educated economists who understand this impediment to cooperative behavior and thus, according to the logic of previous researchers, should behave uncooperatively since they expect their fellow “players” to do likewise.

To measure the extent of voluntary compliance (cooperation) with the AEA dues structure, we distributed a brief survey to 500 randomly-selected, non-foreign, non-student AEA members. We received 301 usable responses and 22 undeliverable or unusable replies (a 62.97% response rate). Respondents identified their annual income by categories, defined exactly the same as the statement of annual membership rates found in the *American Economic Review*. Thus, surveyed AEA members were reporting to us exactly the same information as they ostensibly revealed indirectly through their self-selection into AEA membership categories.

We have reproduced the findings from our analysis in the first part of Table 1. Notice that although only 3% of the survey respondents reported an annual income less than \$37,000, over eight times that many nonstudent, nonfamily AEA members are listed in this category. This is consistent with the existence of “cheating” or, if you will, uncooperative behavior on the part of a sizable fraction of the AEA membership, with respect to paying their Association dues. However, two of every three AEA members earning above \$50,000 per year paid the highest membership rate, \$70, even though such payment was purely voluntary.

Taken by themselves, these numbers tell us little about the *relative* incidence of uncooperative behavior by economists. The empirical issue before us is whether the degree of (un)cooperative behavior exhibited by pro-

fessional economists is significantly (higher) lower than that exhibited by noneconomist professionals.

To shed light on this issue, we replicated our methodology for the American Sociological Association and the American Political Science Association. That is, we obtained information from these two Associations regarding the distribution of paid dues, then distributed questionnaires to 500 randomly-selected non-student, non-foreign “regular” members of each association, asking them to reveal their annual income.³ As with our questionnaire to AEA members, we asked ASA and APSA members to identify their annual income by category, defined exactly the same as their respective Association dues structures. The cover letters sent with the questionnaire card to ASA and APSA members was identical, save Association name, to the one sent to AEA members.

The survey cover letter read as follows:

Dear _____ :

My colleague, Richard Beil, and I are conducting a random survey of American Sociological Association members, to develop a profile of members by employment context and/or academic rank, experience, and earnings. We would greatly appreciate your taking a few seconds to answer three questions on the enclosed card, which has postage guaranteed, and put it in return mail to us:

Thanks for your time and response.

Sincerely,

The enclosed postcard requested the following information from ASA members:

Annual Income (pleas check appropriate category):⁴

- _____ Under \$15,000
- _____ \$15,000–\$19,999
- _____ \$20,000–\$29,999
- _____ \$30,000–\$39,999
- _____ \$40,000–\$49,999

_____ \$50,000 and over.

Year doctoral degree conferred: _____

Employment context: Academic – Rank _____ Instructor
_____ Assistant Professor
_____ Associate Professor
_____ Professor

Non-academic _____ Public sector
_____ Private sector

We identified survey recipients by starting at the beginning of the *ASA 1995–96 Directory of Members* and the *APSA Directory of Members 1994–96* and selecting every tenth individual with “regular” member status. Whenever there was a possibility that the randomly selected individual was not a regular member or (s)he clearly did not list an address within the United States, we excluded that individual from our samples, selecting for inclusion instead the next regular member with a U.S. address.

Of the 500 letters mailed in mid-September 1996 to members of the American Sociological Association (American Political Science Association), we received 294 (297) usable responses, 9 (6) were returned as undeliverable and another 4 (2) responses were unusable. This represents a 61.4% response rate by the ASA members and a 60.4% response rate by the APSA members. The distributions of annual income reported by ASA and APSA members in response to our survey questionnaire are reported in Table 1.

3.3. Findings

At the lower end of the income distributions, we observe uncooperative behavior across-the-board. Only a small fraction of members in each association reported annual income in the lowest income category, while much larger (and quite sizable) fractions of the members of each association actually paid the dues associated with the lowest income category. The numbers reveal that economists and political scientists exhibit similar behavior in their respective lowest dues categories. Roughly 3% of AEA members reported annual income in their lowest category, yet one-quarter of AEA members paid dues

Table 1. Dues payment and actual income of AEA, ASA and APSA members

American Economic Association			
AEA 1994 annual membership rate	AEA-reported dues payment in 1994 (%)	Income category	Survey results on AEA members' income in 1995 (%)
\$50	25.12	$I \leq \$37,000$	2.99
\$60	21.44	$\$37,000 < I \leq \$50,000$	16.61
\$70	53.44	$\$50,000 < I$	80.40
American Sociological Association			
ASA 1995 annual membership rate	ASA-reported dues payment in 1995 (%)	Income category	Survey results on ASA members' income in 1995 (%)
\$34	11.5	$I \leq \$15,000$	3.06
\$58	8.6	$\$15,000 < I \leq \$20,000$	2.38
\$72	11.4	$\$20,000 < I \leq \$29,999$	5.44
\$107	20.75	$\$30,000 < I \leq \$39,999$	12.59
\$132	20.1	$\$40,000 < I \leq \$49,999$	20.75
\$180	27.6	$\$50,000 < I$	55.78
American Political Science Association			
APSA 1995 annual membership rate	APSA-reported dues payment in 1995 (%)	Income category	Survey results on APSA members' income in 1995 (%)
\$65	24.9	$I \leq \$30,000$	2.02
\$80	12.0	$\$30,000 < I \leq \$39,999$	10.77
\$95	17.8	$\$40,000 < I \leq \$49,999$	25.60
\$110	21.8	$\$50,000 < I \leq \$69,999$	32.32
\$125	23.5	$\$70,000 < I$	28.28

in that income category. Similarly, about 2.02% of APSA members reported having an annual income in the lowest category and 25% of APSA members paid dues in that income category. These percentages are fairly close to the cumulative reported percentages in the lowest two income categories for the ASA: 5.44% of ASA members reported annual income in the lowest 2 categories, yet 20% of ASA members paid annual dues in those categories.

At the high end of the income distribution, we observe that approximately 83% of APSA members in the highest-income category and about two-thirds of the highest-income AEA members paid the “correct” dues. However, only about 50% of ASA members in the highest income category also paid the highest dues.

Because neither the income categories or the annual dues are uniform across associations, we cannot make exact comparisons. Nonetheless, we can make close comparisons. One way of comparing is by income: in Table 2 we compare economists with annual income less than or equal to \$37,000 against sociologists and political scientists with annual income less than or equal to \$39,999, and we compare economists with annual income greater than \$50,000 against sociologists and political scientists with annual income greater than \$50,000.

A little over one out of every five members of the AEA (untruthfully) pays dues based on annual income below \$37,000. However, approximately one-quarter of the APSA membership and nearly 3 in 10 ASA members untruthfully pays dues to their respective professional associations in the below \$39,999 income categories. In the above \$50,000 (inclusive) annual income category, about 26% of APSA members pay lower dues than would be expected based on responses to our questionnaire; roughly 33% of AEA members pay lower-than-expected annual dues, and nearly 50% of ASA members pay lower-than-expected annual dues.

Finally, we compare two calculations of the mean annual dues: (1) mean annual dues paid, weighted by the proportion of members paying in each income category, and (2) mean annual dues that “should have been paid” according to responses to our questionnaires, weighted by the proportion of members reporting income in each category. The weighted mean annual dues payment by members of the American Economic Association in 1994 was \$62.83. If AEA members had paid dues in accordance with the questionnaire-based distribution of income, the weighted mean annual dues payment would have been \$67.74. That is, the AEA actually collected about 93% of the recommended annual dues. The weighted mean annual dues payment by members of the American Sociological Association in 1995 was \$112.52. If ASA members had paid dues in accordance with the questionnaire-based distribution of income, the weighted mean annual dues payment would have

Table 2. Comparisons of dues payment across professional associations

	Annual income	Cumulative percent of Association members paying annual dues	Cumulative percent of Association members reporting annual income	Difference
Economics	I ≤ \$37,000	25.12	2.99	22.13
Sociology	I ≤ \$39,999	52.25	23.47	28.78
Political Science	I ≤ \$39,999	36.90	12.79	24.11
Economics	I > \$50,000	53.44	80.40	26.96
Sociology	I ≥ \$50,000	27.60	55.78	28.18
Political Science	I ≥ \$50,000	45.30	60.60	15.30

Mean annual dues paid by AEA members: \$62.83.
Mean annual dues if paid on basis of actual income: \$67.74.
AEA collects 93% of the recommended dues.

Mean annual dues paid by ASA members: \$115.52.
Mean annual dues if paid on basis of actual income: \$147.60.
ASA collects 78% of the recommended dues.

Mean annual dues paid by APSA members: \$96.05.
Mean annual dues if paid on basis of actual income: \$105.15.
APSA collects 91% of the recommended dues.

been \$147.60. Thus, the ASA actually collected only about 78% of their income-based annual dues. The difference in percentage between the AEA and the ASA is highly significant. Finally, the weighted mean annual dues payment by American Political Science Association members in 1995 was \$96.05 while the amount that would have been paid with no misrepresentation was \$105.15; the APSA collected just over 91% of their income-based dues. This also is significantly lower than the percentage collected by the AEA.⁵

4. Concluding thoughts

Our findings are straightforward, as are the implications. We find that professional economists are no less cooperative than professional political scientists when it comes to paying their professional Association dues. However, sociologists exhibit a significantly lower degree of cooperative behavior with respect to payment of their Association dues than either economists or political scientists. This occurs despite the fact that professional sociologists are

undoubtedly better schooled than economists (in particular) and political scientists are regarding the putative benefits of cooperative behavior. We revisit the principal proponents of the view that economists are less cooperative than everyone else to interpret this result.

Carter and Irons (1991) suggested that “economists are born, not made”. That is, there are innate differences in outlook/personality that cause individuals to select into economics (or political science or sociology) as an occupation. If actions speak louder than words and if real-world behavior is more compelling to scientists than “experiments” with undergraduate students, only some of which were salient, then our finding that professional economists are significantly more cooperative than either professional political scientists or professional sociologists in social dilemmas constitutes compelling evidence in the debate about the honesty/cooperativeness of economists. Frank, Gilovich, and Regan (1993) argued that economists learn to behave uncooperatively in social dilemmas, because, by virtue of their training in economics, they expect everyone else to behave uncooperatively also. They use this argument as a springboard for suggesting that: “With an eye toward both the social good and the well-being of their own students, economists may wish to stress a broader view of human motivation in their teaching (p. 171). Put more bluntly, we should stop teaching the self-interest model of human behavior because that model is an accurate description of our own behavior. As it turns out, the self-interest model turns out to be pretty accurate at describing the behavior of professional sociologists, who are been schooled intensively in the virtues of cooperation in social dilemmas.

Both professional political scientists and professional sociologists have a greater (monetary) incentive to “cheat” with respect to paying their annual Association dues than do professional economists. The maximum savings to a professional economist who misrepresents his/her annual income to the AEA is \$20 per year, a 29% savings from the annual dues that (s)he would have paid with correct representation of his/her annual income. A professional political scientist with earnings in the highest income category but who pays dues in the lowest category will save \$60 per year, 48% less than the dues associated with the highest income category. However, a professional sociologist can save as much as \$146 per year (an 81% savings) by misrepresenting his/her annual income to the ASA when paying dues. The degree of misrepresentation lines up perfectly with the incentives. The most misrepresentation of annual incomes to the professional associations we examined occurs in sociology, followed by political science, and then economics.

Even as we acknowledge the differential incentive for ASA members to “cheat” on their professional association dues, we are keenly aware that this recognition may itself be peculiar to economists. We suspect that sociologists

regard the kind of uncooperative behavior that “cheating” on association dues represents as resulting from some sort of innate or learned pathology, rather than as a straightforward example of the law of demand. There is something “wrong” with the individual who exhibits uncooperative behavior (by free-riding on the contributions of others, cheating on annual dues, etc.). Couched in this light, our findings cannot make for pleasant reading by professional sociologists.

Having said this, we hasten to provide our interpretation of the results. We believe that there are no significant differences between professional economists, sociologists, political scientists (or members of other occupations) with respect to honesty or cooperative behavior. Our finding of differences in dues payment to their respective professional associations results, in our opinion, from the differentially greater incentive to “cheat” (or higher cost of “honesty”) experienced by sociologists and political scientists, as compared to economists. Given identical dues structures and incomes, we suspect that we would find no differences in the actual pattern of dues payment across the three disciplines we examined.

However, if the differential “cheating” by professional sociologist, and, to a lesser extent, by professional political scientists, as compared to professional economists, on their Association dues is at least partly explainable by virtue of the differential incentive to cheat that is built into the dues structures, then this strikes us as a very compelling reason to continue teaching the self-interest model of human behavior. The differential incentive to cheat incites predictable, *self-interested* behavior out of precisely those individuals who should be least affected by the learned aspect of that imperative. Under the circumstances, with an eye toward the social good, the well-being of our own students, and most importantly, scientific accuracy, we’ll continue to stress the rational self-interest theory of human motivation in our teaching.

Notes

1. Previous authors have tended to use the terms “selfish”, “uncooperative”, “dishonest”, and “cheater” interchangeably. While we follow in this tradition for expository purposes, we are aware that these terms are not perfect substitutes. However, we suspect that there is a generally shared meaning (by previous authors) imputed by these terms, so that we all are referring to the same kind of behavior: selfish *versus* unselfish, cooperative *versus* uncooperative, etc.
2. It is not clear that “cheating” is the appropriate description for the behavior that we reported. There is no monitoring of dues payment by the AEA, nor are there any explicit penalties for the individual who does not pay “correctly” according to his/her income. Indeed, one might argue that the dues structure of the AEA is discriminatory, since the marginal cost of to the Association of providing journals or other services is not affected by the individual’s income. We do, of course, observe individuals expending considerable

resources to avoid being victimized by price discrimination in other contexts. However, as Hansmann (1981) argued, voluntary price discrimination may be the *sine qua non* of public goods provision in a club context. If so, and if one regards professional associations like the AEA, the American Sociological Association, and the American Political Science Association as public goods-providing clubs, then the kind of “cheating” that we observed among AEA members certainly can be described as “uncooperative” behavior.

3. The dues payment information for the American Sociological Association was provided by Connie Castillo in membership/customer services; for the American Political Science Association, this information was provided by Director of Member Services, Helen Cook. We are grateful for their assistance.
4. The income categories listed on the postcard to APSA members were:

————— \$70,000 and over
 ————— \$50,000–\$69,999
 ————— \$40,000–\$49,999
 ————— \$30,000–\$39,999
 ————— Under \$30,000

5. We conducted pairwise proportions tests for the comparison between the AEA and the ASA and between the AEA and the APSA with respect to the proportion of mean dues actually paid to mean dues that would have paid with complete honesty. The tests of difference between the AEA and the ASA (APSA) both were significant at better than the 0.001 level.

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