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Essays in Behavioural Economics

Most of the economic literature takes preferences as given. Economists use them as the building blocks of their models, estimate them in lab experiments and correlate them with life outcomes. But we only rarely ask about their origins. How come that fundamental preferences such as risk aversion, reciprocity, inequality aversion and altruism vary so strongly across individuals? Are they biologically predetermined or can we shape them through upbringing and education?

This dissertation aims to take a step towards answering these questions. Chapter two investigates whether the willingness to compete in a tournament varies over the menstrual cycle and with the intake of hormonal contraceptives. Chapters three and four correlate choices in social preference games with physical markers for underlying neural differences. Chapter five deals with the consequences rather than the origins of individual differences in economic preferences and investigates whether gender differences in academic career choices can be explained by gender differences in the willingness to compete.

Thomas Buser holds a Bachelor degree from the University of Lausanne and a Master degree from the University of Warwick. He graduated from the Tinbergen Institute MPhil program in 2009 and conducted his PhD research at the University of Amsterdam.

Essays in Behavioural Economics
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