

Fairness or spite? What is the Ultimatum Game about?

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ABSTRACT

In the Ultimatum Game, a proposer and a responder have to agree on how to split a sum of money. If the responder rejects the proposer's offer, both players get nothing. Rejection of positive but unequal offers is considered a form of costly punishment of unfair behavior able to enforce the social norm of fairness. However, research using other experimental frameworks has shown that punishment can be also driven by competitive and spiteful motivations and furthermore that, in the presence of such punishers, sanctioning institutions may finally be detrimental for the social norm. By analyzing responders' behavior in a different social situation (as dictators in the Dictator Game) we show the existence of both 'spiteful' and 'fair' punishers also in the Ultimatum Game.

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