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To whom it may concern

I have been asked to evaluate whether Tomas Miklanek's "Essays in Experimental Economics", a dissertation draft in partial fulfilment for graduation from the doctoral program at CERGE, makes the grade. The answer is without doubt, yes. Tomas has demonstrated an impressive set of skills ranging from identifying interesting research topics, the design and implementation of pertinent experiments (in chapter 1 based on a theoretical contribution of his own), a good handle on the econometric evaluation of his results, and an excellent command of the English language. This last point cannot be overemphasized. The writing is of a maturity that stands out.

All comments that follow are simply annotations/suggestions towards potential publication.

I would change the title of the dissertation; "Essays in Experimental Economics" is too bland and unspecific.

Chapter 1 is descriptively titled "The Effect of Shame in Dictator Games with Information Asymmetry". Tomas models first how the belief of a fully informed party about the belief of a less informed party, as induced by the fully-informed party's action, is formed. The key moderator, drawing on literature in psychology, is postulated to be shame. For shame to work its prosocial magic it is assumed here to need audience effects. (An alternative moderator/explanation could be moral scruples, as for example List (JPE 2007) tries to argue.) A key finding of the experimental testing of the model is that even a small exposure to shame leads to an increase in monetary transfers. That is not that surprising a finding, given the results in Dana et al. (ET 2007), Cherry et al. (AER 2002), Hoffman et al. (AER 1996) and, for that matter, Engel (EE 2011) who all deal with the effects of information asymmetry and/or social distance on giving behaviour and they should be discussed before the chapter is submitted for publication somewhere. For example, it should be discussed why going from single-blind to double-blind in Hoffman et al. is different from having one observer here or none. Likewise Dufwenberg & Gneezy (GEB 2000) on measuring beliefs in a related game experiment. Another key finding – that the increased giving comes from the extensive margin rather than the intensive margin (e.g., p. 20) – is more surprising and worth pondering more.

I note that the sample size has not been rationalized by power calculations. When the experiments were conducted in 2012, that was par for the course. These days, many journals (e.g., JoEP) would desk-reject submissions when power/sample size calculations would not be supplied. Because the empirical strategy here is null-hypothesis significance testing, there is additional reason to do so. Otherwise the use of various significance tests has only so much meaning. Somewhat relatedly, p. 21, fn 30, is troubling. Was there no comprehension test? More detail is needed there.

Chapter 2 is titled "Ego-utility and Endogeneous Information Acquisition: An Experimental Study". The paper is motivated by findings such as the ones in Ryvkin et al. (2012) who demonstrate empirically that people are pretty good Bayesian updaters in the real world, except those at the bottom of the distribution. These people (essentially the bottom 2 deciles) consistently overestimate their performance – notwithstanding that in the Ryvkin et al. setting they are force-fed new information -- and it could be for several possible explanations including the kind of self-esteem and ego-utility arguments proposed in Benabou & Tirole (2003, 2003) and Koeszegi (2006).

Tomas sets up an interesting experiment in which the degree of information acquisition is used to tease apart various explanation such as ego-utility, self-image (cognitive dissonance), and confirmation bias. It's a clever experiment and IMHO the most innovative one in this dissertation. A key problem, as acknowledged, is that the number of experimental participants is too low to draw more than tantalizing and suggestive conclusions although it seems likely that ego-utility is not the major reason why people make the information acquisition choices that they make. Once again, to increase the chances of this paper placing well, it would be desirable to power the experiment up properly.

I also note that the information acquisition is moderated by the strength of incentives and that stronger incentives might lead to more of it. Last but not least I note that the optimal information acquisition here (because it is costless to call up the ten signals) is a corner solution, which implies that simple mistakes (that for an interior equilibrium would fall on both sides of the solution and might cancel out) are truncated, potentially making mistakes to look more meaningful and informative than they really are. Since relatively few subjects were found in the middle ground that is not much of a problem here, however.

Chapter 3 is titled "Do Fixed-Prize Lotteries Crowd-Out Public Good Contributions Driven By Social Preferences". The paper is motivated by theoretical and experimental work that suggested that bundling a public good with a private good such as a fixed-prize lottery has the potential to overcome the well-documented free-riding that we see consistently in public good contribution games (at least those that have corner solutions). Past literature has explored whether contributions react to the existence of such a prize. Not surprisingly, they do, as demonstrated for example in Morgan & Sefton (2000, for the fun of it see also Hausken & Ortmann AEL 2008) which is a major reference point for the authors' design (e.g., in the choice of the prizes used). Acknowledging that in each of these situations

there are different types (unconditional contributors as well as conditional contributors for example), Tomas and Peter explore to what extent positive contributions in VCM that are driven by positive expected contributions of others (e.g., conditional contributions) may be crowded out. In their experimental design they attempt specifically to tease apart the effect of one's prize-seeking incentive and the recognition that others might contribute for the same reason rather than some unconditional social preference. They concoct an intermediate treatment in which one group member cannot win in the lottery (hence taking away the prize-seeking incentive). That's quite clever a design and they are careful in controlling for confounds that might arise.

Consistent with previous literature, Tomas and Peter find sizable contributions for the baseline and even higher contributions for the fixed-prize lottery treatment. They also find, as conjectured, a drop in average contributions in the intermediate treatment, which is suggestive of crowding-out effects on average. The authors furthermore investigate the degree of crowding out as a function of degrees of elicited pro-sociality.

Here, too, before submission to a journal, the authors should justify the sample size. Otherwise various claims about (marginal) significance (e.g., p. 54 or p. 58) are only so meaningful. Plus, as mentioned above, several journals have now policies in place that require power calculations. At the minimum, this issue ought to be addressed in the discussion of limitations which otherwise I appreciated.

Typos:

p. v (abstract), last paragraph, second line, it should be "provision" rather than privision

p. 1 The last sentence on the page, starting with "The crucial feature … " is rather cumbersome and awkward.

p. 2, line 5, "So model … " should be "So the model … " and that is also not a good way to start a sentence.

p. 12, fn 12. That is not exactly what Brandts & Charness say. At best you can claim that the evidence on the effects of the strategy method is inconclusive.

p. 14, fn 16. Better: The ORSEE recruitment software and the LEE database have been used … Also, use the Greiner (2015) reference and delete the 2004 references everywhere.

p. 27, 4th line from the end of section 2.1, it should be for rational-agent theory …

p. 30, last line: The Krajc et al. reference can presumably be substituted by Ryvkin et al. (2012)

p. 33, under 2.3.2, change the ORSEE reference to Greiner (2015).

p. 34: The subjects are not "very sharply selected into four main groups", they either select themselves, or they fall into …

p. 39, line 7: "I refrain from … " is sufficient.

p. 41, title. "… Crowd Out … " does not need to have a dash in it.

p. 49, last paragraph on the page: "Consistent with … " in both cases.

In sum, let me repeat what I said at the beginning: Tomas has demonstrated an impressive set of skills ranging from identifying interesting research topics, the design and implementation of pertinent experiments (in chapter 1 based on a theoretical contribution of his own), a good handle on the econometric evaluation of his results, and an excellent command of the English language.

Congratulations on a job well done, both to the student and his supervisor.