

Details about the Thematic Area

Prosociality and trust have been characterized across the disciplines as essential elements in the constitution of human society and culture. On its part, social anthropology has documented extensively the many forms prosocial practices—practices that are beneficial to others and costly to the self—take across cultures and the social conditions in which people trust others to act prosocially. In turn, cognitive psychology and behavioral economics have developed theories about the stable preferences, the desires and motivations that lead people to make prosocial choices and to trust others. While studies about prosociality and trust are thriving, they remain to a large extent constrained within the bounds of academic disciplines.

We seek candidates who are willing to undertake interdisciplinary research at the crossroads of the anthropology of morality and psychology of prosociality. Social anthropology has shown that prosocial practices can take very different forms, from gift exchange to alms giving, and from ritual to everyday life. These practices are integrated in a web of cultural beliefs (moral, religious, economic, political) and shaped by their relation to other social phenomena. Anthropologists studying the socio-cultural factors that foster or sanction prosocial behavior and determine people's moral judgments would further benefit from understanding the underlying psychological processes. By contrast, psychologists have studied prosocial preferences such as 'inequity aversion', 'preference for fairness', 'aversion to disappointing', 'sense of commitment', 'norm abidance' as psychological factors that motivate prosocial choices. These preferences have been studied in controlled, experimental settings where choices are supposedly disconnected from the cultural environments in which they normally take place. However, understanding prosocial behavior as it occurs in social context involves specifying how social institutions and cultural environment influence the formation of the underlying preferences and trigger or inhibit prosocial choices.