

The last issue of [Current Anthropology](#) reports a research conducted by Polly Wiessner among the Ju/'hoan Bushmen of the Kalahari. Like a recent article by Gurven (see our previous [post](#)), this research calls into question the relevance of economic games. Here is the abstract:

Experimental games - the dictator game and the ultimatum game - were played out among the Ju/'hoan Bushmen of the Kalahari. Subsequently, the experimenter tracked what the players did with the money earned in the games to see how it was used in "games of everyday life." Players were stingy and did not punish in experimental games and were generous and did punish in "games of life." The fact that the conditions of anonymity of the games removed cultural institutions and emotions governing sharing and reciprocity lead Ju/'hoansi to reassess risks and benefits and play more selfishly. The findings underline the importance of cultural institutions such as sharing, reciprocity, and social sanctions (costly punishment) to provide the structure for other-regarding behavior to be expressed and to be rendered beneficial for the participants.

Note that a less "cultural" view is possible. Indeed, Wiessner emphasizes the role of culture and institutions (such as Xaro, a formal gift exchange partnerships). However, from an evolutionary and cognitive point of view, one could note that people lack the most basic cues to behave morally: They interact with an unknown person, they don't know whether they are going to interact with her again, if she is trustworthy, they do not know anything about her situation (is she hungry? ill? wealthy?), etc. In other words, from an evolutionary and cognitive point of view, the participants' moral sense may think that it is not at all a situation when one has a duty to share.