I am pleased to inform you that the Economics Department will again offer 14.11, Insights from Game Theory into Social Behavior, this coming fall semester. It will be taught on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9-10:30 a.m. in E25-117. The instructors will be Erez Yoeli and Moshe Hoffman from Harvard. You should be able to add the class to your fall pre-registration if you are interested. A description of the class follows:

We apply insights from game theory to explain human social behavior, focusing on novel applications which have heretofore been the realm of psychologists and philosophers—for example, why people speak indirectly, in what sense beauty is socially constructed, and where our moral intuitions come from—and eschewing traditional economic applications such as industrial organization or auctions.

We will employ standard games such as the prisoners dilemma, coordination, hawk-dove, and costly signaling, and use standard game theory tools such as Nash equilibria, subgame perfection, and Bayesian games. These tools will be rigorously taught from scratch and no existing knowledge of game theory, economics, or mathematics is required. At the same time, students familiar with these games and tools will not find the course redundant because of the focus on non-orthodox applications.

In order to apply game theory to social applications, we will also introduce models of learning and evolution, employing mathematical techniques such as first order differential equations and Markov processes, as well as simple computer simulations in Matlab or Python. These, too, will be taught from scratch; no prior experience with differential equations or computer programming is required.

The class will cover readings from other fields, such as research papers on animal behavior, and experiments in economics and psychology. Again, no background in these areas is required.

We hope this class will stimulate students with a new perspective on age-old questions, expand their economics toolkit, broaden the range of questions to which students consider applying these tools, and generate dialogue that will deepen not only students' understanding of the world around them, but also our own.

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