

Looking for the Origins of Inequality Aversion and Moral Judgment

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In my talk I will present many studies, most of them from our lab, with the aim of tackling a core problem in moral and developmental psychology: how does humans' ability to judge distributive fairness originate and develop in early childhood? There is now a rapidly growing evidence relevant to this question concerning infants aged 10 to 24 months, coming from research conducted in the past 7 years using different experimental paradigms and dependent variables. I will argue that this evidence strongly suggests that the acquisition of the capacity to assign positive or negative valence to different kinds of distributive actions performed towards third parties cannot be accounted for by the acquisition mechanisms posited by classic empiricist or constructivist theories of moral development but, more plausibly, relies on a domain-specific, evolved adaptation. Finally, I will ask whether this body of evidence may also provide selective support for current evolutionist views on the origins of morality and the sense of fairness.