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Modeling the Costly Rejection of Wrongdoers by Children using a Bayesian Approach

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Abstract

In previous work, young children avoided associating with a wrongdoer, despite incurring a personal cost. Such aversion to wrongdoers, arguably a reflection of moral development, weakens when the cost becomes very large (Tasimi & Wynn, 2016). We model this moral decision-making process using the naive utility calculus (Jara-Ettinger et al., 2016), assuming utility maximization amidst uncertainty using Bayesian framework. The cost is defined as the number of stickers forgone by choosing a nice person's smaller offer over a mean person's larger one, following the ratios of 1:2, 1:4, 1:8, and 1:16. Our model aims to explain previous findings, and test predictions for new ratios. Compared to a baseline condition where no background information is available, children are predicted to choose the nice person when the cost is low, but reverse their preference when the cost becomes increasingly high, which would suggest a utility account for moral decision making.