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## The early development of the normative mind

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### ABSTRACT

Normativity is pervasive in everyday human social interactions and perhaps even constitutive of human forms of group and societal living. During the past decade, there has been increased interest in the ontogeny of normativity and the role that norms play in early social reasoning and behavior. Given the ubiquity of normativity, it is vital to investigate the development of children's normative understanding and behavior in a variety of different contexts, ranging from prosocial behavior to rational action or from linguistic competencies to cultural norms and values. Hence, in this special issue on *the early development of the normative mind*, researchers from different theoretical traditions have employed a number of different methods (e.g., third-party norm enforcement, judgment and reasoning, social behavior) to address different, yet related, research questions about the ontogeny of normativity. Here, we introduce the reader to the current debate and point to important research questions for the field.

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### Introduction

Norms are a fundamental pillar of human social life (Brandom, 1994; Carpendale, Hammond, & Atwood, 2013; Turiel, 2002) and guide our conduct in virtually any social interaction, be it on an interpersonal, group, or institutional level (Nunner-Winkler, 2007). Consequently, the development of children's reliance on and understanding of norms has been a long-standing topic in developmental psychology. For example, in his seminal work, Piaget (1932/1965) examined how children construe

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rules in social games and suggested developmental change in a stage-like fashion from egocentric thinking about norms (or rather dictates, i.e., heteronomy) to more cooperative and reflective thinking about norms (autonomy). This line of work was further developed by putting particular emphasis on the ontogeny of moral judgment and individuals' justification for why one should act in certain ways by Kohlberg (1963, 1969).

Whereas these traditional accounts largely assumed that young children are heteronomously motivated to follow norms (e.g., by relying on adult authorities and fear of punishment) and do not understand much about their context-specific application or even origin (but see Carpendale, 2009, for an elaborated defense of a Piagetian approach), more recent research provided evidence for a hitherto underestimated appreciation of social norms in young children. For instance, a rich body of work by the social domain tradition suggests that preschoolers make systematic distinctions between different types of norms when reasoning about hypothetical situations (e.g., moral, conventional, and personal norms; Killen & Smetana, 2015). And more recent research suggests that in their social interactions, young children proactively enforce norms by criticizing others who violate rules even if children themselves are not affected by a norm violation (e.g., Rakoczy, Warneken, & Tomasello, 2008; for a review, see Rakoczy, & Schmidt, 2013; for criticism, see Brandl, Esken, Priewasser, & Rafetseder, 2015). Further evidence comes from research on children's fairness understanding and behavior. Here, it has been shown that preschool children appreciate fairness norms (Rochat et al., 2009; Smith, Blake, & Harris, 2013), that they request and enforce fair behavior by others (Paulus, Gillis, Li, & Moore, 2013; Rakoczy, Kaufmann, & Lohse, 2016), and that with age children increasingly rectify inequality while occasionally also endorsing inequality if justified (Elenbaas, Rizzo, Cooley, & Killen, 2016; Paulus, 2014a; Schmidt, Svetlova, Johe, & Tomasello, 2016). Further research on children's understanding of conventional norms, such as game rules, showed that by 3 years of age children apply rules in context-specific ways and tend to infer them promiscuously based on minimal evidence such as the intentionality of an agent (e.g., Schmidt, Butler, Heinz, & Tomasello, 2016). These recent lines of work converge in their demonstration of an early developing motivation for, reliance on, and understanding of social norms.

In addition to work on the normative foundations of prosocial behavior and reasoning about others' welfare (i.e., morality; Paulus, 2014b, 2018), scholars pointed to the normative nature of early imitation and social learning (e.g., research on over-imitation; Kenward, 2012), language acquisition, and epistemic activities (Schmidt & Rakoczy, in press). Across several research areas and domains, thus, there has been increased interest in the normative nature of young children's reasoning, judgment, and behavior. Consequently, it has been suggested that a full understanding of early developmental changes in these domains requires an appreciation of young children's emerging understanding of normativity. In other words, the emerging awareness of normativity has been supposed to play a major role across a number of important domains, including imitation, reasoning, and judgment in social contexts, language learning, and (pro)social behavior.

### Important questions about the developing normative mind

Thus, recent years have seen considerable advance in theory and research on children's developing normative mind and behavior. At the same time, there are more and more exciting new questions arising from both classical and new findings as well as from attempts to integrate research on normativity with other domains and topics of investigation.

For example, important questions pertain to how normative reasoning and behavior relate to each other (for debates, see Haidt, 2001; Turiel, 2002) and how they develop in contexts involving multiple issues (e.g., on individual and group levels) and domains (e.g., moral and conventional norms) given that such situations mimic children's real-life experience to a large degree. For instance, how do children balance individual, group, and moral concerns?

Moreover, the norms of the social world differ in important aspects from the laws of the physical world (Brandom, 1994). Yet, little is known about how young children come to differentiate between those norms and laws (e.g., Kalish, 1998). That is, although much research suggests that children begin early to categorize, apply, and reason about norms, it is not clear how far their differentiation of norms

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