

# Swiss Center for Affective Sciences

## Cognitive Disintegration, Agency & Attachment

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**LECTURE**

**Tuesday,  
October 18<sup>th</sup>  
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12:15 - 13:15

Campus Biotech  
Room 144.165  
9, chemin des Mines  
Geneva

Moral requirements often direct us to act in ways that are contrary to our personal interests. Altruistic requirements are a central case, asking that we act with the aim of benefitting another at a cost to ourselves. What motivates us to comply with such requirements? One traditional view is that altruistic actions are in part explained by affective empathy, where that is a nature-given propensity to mirror and be moved by the needs of our conspecifics. More recently, some theorists have opposed this view, arguing that empathy is dispensable to moral motivation: while morality may require concern for our fellows, that concern need not be produced by empathic engagement – it need not be empathic concern as such.

I defend the traditional view that empathy underpins our responsiveness to many moral requirements. I depart from tradition, however, in two ways. First, I distinguish between non-rational and rational empathic concern, characterizing the latter as on analogy with the phenomenon of perceptual, and especially aesthetic ‘experiencing-as’. Secondly, I argue that, in the basic case, rational empathic concern depends on a feat of cognitive integration by which an agent’s experience is configured in accordance with norms of consistency and coherence. A virtue of this account that it suggests why psychopathic subjects typically manifest deficits of cognitive integration in concert with empathic ones – and how these deficits jointly work to compromise their standing as moral agents. I conclude with some observations about the possible role of early attachment failure in the developmental trajectory of cognitive disintegration, and the implications for attributions of moral agency ■

Swiss Doctoral School in Affective Sciences

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