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# Affect & Emotion Newsletter of the NCCR Affective Sciences









# RESEARCH FOCUS

Moral Emotions: Answering the big questions

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Museum de Neuchâtel - Emotions © A. Germond

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## EDITORIAL



Emotion

#### appy 2015!

In the name of the Swiss Center for Affective Sciences, I wish you a happy 2015! Among the reasons why we hope 2015 will be a very emotional year, I would like to highlight two important events in which our Center is strongly involved.

The Center has collaborated with the Natural History Museum of Neuchâtel in order to welcome you to an exhibition on Emotion. Focusing on the natural history of emotion, the exhibition runs until the end of November 2015. To the best of our knowledge, this exhibition is the largest ever created on the scientific study of emotion. It will both explain and induce emotions!

In 2015, the meeting of the International Society for Research on Emotion (ISRE) will take place in Geneva (July 8-10, with pre- and post-conferences on the 7th and 11th). Our goal in putting together ISRE 2015 is to provide researchers with the most vibrant environment to present their work, to offer a thorough overview of ongoing developments in the affective sciences, and to showcase the latest discoveries in all disciplines with an interest in emotions broadly understood. Please visit our website (http://www. isre2015.org) for updates on the program!

I am looking forward to welcoming you to one of these events in 2015, or to other ones organized by the Center

David Sander

# **R**ESEARCH FOCUS





## Moral Emotions: Answering the big questions

#### Interview with Dr Florian Cova from the Research Focus on Moral Emotions

E ver since Aristotle connected emotions to moral judgment, philosophers and psychologists have debated this relationship. In the last decade the subject has gained attention with the increasing recognition that emotions are a source of moral evaluations and not a barrier. However, although moral emotions have been on the scientific agenda for some time, there is still much to explore.

With its strong multidisciplinary pedigree the subject of moral emotions has found a fitting home at the NCCR Affective Sciences. An active group has been running since 2011, making excellent headway both with theory and research. One of its major accomplishments is the study of the ubiquitous but under-researched emotion of 'being moved'. This is the warm fuzzy feeling, sometimes accompanied by tearfulness, that we experience when we listen to music, watch a film or hear a story that is particularly touching. Until now, little was known about the emotion and its connection to our moral behavior.

"Previously there has been a tendency to focus on the more negative emotions when looking at their relationship to morality," explains Dr Florian Cova, post-doctoral researcher and member of the 'Moral Emotions' group. "For example shame, guilt, indignation and disgust have received quite a lot of attention, but we believe there are some very interesting moral phenomena occurring with positive emotions. As such we set out to define 'being moved' as a distinct and describable emotion and then to investigate its impact on our moral thinking and behavior."

Building on the work of Prof. Julien Deonna, the research has refined the definition of the emotion on the basis of results from surveys of over 200 students who were asked to recall and describe an occasion when they had felt particularly moved. This has provided insight into what triggers the emotion, as well as the details of its impact.

"Our results suggest there are two types of 'being moved'," says Cova. "One is a kind of compassion or indirect sadness felt towards a person or situation and the other is a more pleasant and uplifting feeling. In our research about 70 per cent of experiences of 'being moved' were positive and 30 per cent were negative. Both are accompanied by a feeling of tearfulness and a lump in the throat, but otherwise they are quite distinct."

Further research has indicated that the experience of being moved by a positive situation generates a wish to behave more socially and to strengthen bonds with family, close friends and community. "As well as influencing actions, being moved also seems to adjust the way we think about the world," says Cova. "So people tend to focus on what seems important to them and to take a critical stance about themselves. It also leads people to take a more optimistic view of the world and humanity and to feel 'part of a whole'."

To unpick how these reported impacts translate into action a study is now underway to explore whether listening to moving music encourages altruistic behavior. This uses excerpts of music from relatively unknown films and measures their effect on donating money to charity.

Another major line of research undertaken within the NCCR Affective Sciences involves the hotly debated concept of 'free will'. By focusing on passionate love the group is exploring whether our belief in free will influences our level of love. Using questionnaires that tap into these two concepts the research has suggested that, if we believe we have control over our lives, then we seem to experience higher levels of romantic love.

"Whether it is our belief in free will that allows us to love more passionately or being in love that increases our belief in free will is not clear," explains Cova. "However we are currently working on a method to manipulate conviction in free will so we can investigate the causal direction."

The study also explored cross-cultural effects. Interestingly it found no significant differences between groups from the USA and India despite the generally held belief that the cultures are diverse in their views of both free will and love.

Having started some exciting forays into moral emotions, the group is keen to build on their findings and explore practical implications. "There are possible applications of our research in terms of describing what moves people in films and music," explains Cova. "But we are also hoping that, by developing more precise methods to measure the degree of 'being moved', we may be able to contribute to understanding certain clinical conditions where people have difficulties feeling this emotion. Any insight into free will is fascinating and our work may be valuable in investigating the impact of current scientific messages in the media that suggest we are not free at all but slaves to our biology."

The subject of moral emotions is clearly gaining interest amongst both academia and the general public. Centuries on from Aristotle's proposals it seems there is a thirst to investigate this area and to answer the big questions using innovative research methods

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## INTERVIEW





### An exhibition by the Natural History Museum of Neuchâtel and the NCCR Affective Sciences, University of Geneva Prof Didier Grandjean

e tend to think of our emotions as individual and personal experiences, but a new exhibition organized by the NCCR Affective Sciences and the Natural History Museum at Neuchâtel may challenge these beliefs. By tracking the origin and evolution of emotions and our similarities with other species, it provides an interactive and thought provoking journey through the emotional landscape.

There have been two years of concerted preparations for the exhibition, which will be opened to the public on the 29th of November 2014. Professor Didier Grandjean and his team have been providing the center's input into the project, working closely with Dr Christophe Dufour, the Museum's director and his team of cultural mediators and biologists.

"The main purpose is to demonstrate how emotions are biologically rooted," explains Professor Grandjean. "But also how they are influenced by cultural and social aspects. In a nutshell the exhibition provides a visual summary of what science can tell us about the balance of nature-nurture in our emotions. This includes the demonstration that some seemingly primitive species have quite sophisticated emotional systems and that these systems are similar to our own species but with less opportunity for learning and flexibility. The final part of the exhibition covers the future of emotions, looking at how we are building software to decode our emotions in an increasingly connected world and modulating computers to mimic these emotions, which has important et hical consequence to be taken into consideration as well."

The NCCR Affective Sciences has been involved in a range of projects to connect the public with emotion research but this exhibition is the largest of its kind with several researchers from the center contributing to the content. Public engagement with science is an important part of the center's work and the exhibition builds on the center's previous experience and the museum's expertise in producing original and interactive experiences.

"We hope that it will communicate the current scientific messages about emotions to a larger public," says Professor Grandjean. "And to convey the research in an understandable language. I also believe it is important for us as scientists to go outside of the lab and confront real problems and real life, especially in the field of emotions. So it really is a two-way communication because it ensures that we articulate our research and listen to the concerns and questions of the public and of the society."

One of the central goals of the exhibition is to provide a truly interactive experience that engages the audience and leaves a lasting impression after they have left.

This sets the scene for thinking about our own emotions and those of others. Moreover, throughout the exhibition, there are several opportunities for interactions and experience emotions. These include a live squid in an aquarium to illustrate synchronized behaviors within a species, the opportunity to see how dancing with others affects your emotions and to test your abilities to decode emotions in others.

"Being a neuroscientist my favourite part of the exhibition is the one dedicated to the brain," admits Professor Grandjean. "But we hope there is something for everyone at this exhibition. The idea is that these interactive aspects scattered throughout the exhibition will allow visitors to link the knowledge and material on display to their own experiences. I believe it will be of interest to a wide audience because we all constantly experience or witness some kind of emotion and the exhibition can help to understand the mechanisms at work in the body and the brain."

According to Professor Grandjean, the experience of organizing the exhibition has also involved plenty of interaction and knowledge transfer. "What has been really nice is interacting with everyone from the museum and the scientists who specialize in biology," explains Professor Grandjean. "It has sparked my interest in investigating how emotions are represented in other animals and I am hoping to start a project looking at this fascinating question. In addition, I've thoroughly enjoyed learning more about how to communicate our work and organize the information in a stimulating and engaging way."

The exhibition is at the Natural History Museum in Neuchâtel (www.museum-Neuchâtel.ch/) and runs until the end of November 2015. It was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) and is accompanied by a 64-page catalogue in French and English with illustrations provided in particular by the World Wildlife Foundation (WWF), and the State Darwin Museum.

The following people contributed to the exhibition and to the edition of the catalogue: for the NCCR Affective Sciences – SCAS, University of Geneva (UNIGE): David Sander (Director), Didier Grandjean, Naem Baron, Guillaume Chanel, Fabrice Clément, Florian Cova, Inès Mehu-Blantar, Marc Mehu, Donald Glowinsky, Katja Schlegel, Carole Varone, Johanna Wiebke Trost; for the Natural history museum of Neuchâtel: Christophe Dufour (Director), Célia Bueno, Pauline de Montmollin, Charlène Ruppli, Yannick Soller, Jessica Litman and Anne Ramseyer



# NEWS

#### Grants received

Alain Pé-Curto (project Emotion, Attention and Value) benefited from an SNF Mobility Grant to support his stay at Rutgers University Department of Philosophy as a visiting scholar and a part-time lecturer (February 2014–July 2014). Virginie Sterpenich (project Influence of Emotional Relevance and Sleep on Learning and Future Decision Making) was awarded the Gertrude von Meissner Foundation Award in November 2014 for her research on the "Impact of electronic media on sleep and mental health in adolescents".

Santiago Echeverri (project Emotion, Attention and Value) started working on the new SNF Project: "Sensing as Activity: Its Impact on the Structure of Perceptual and Emotional Experience", led by Julien Deonna and Fabrice Teroni (August 2014 – July 2017).

Cyrielle Chappuis and Didier Grandjean (project From Elicitation to Emotional Response: Neural Mechanisms of Patterning and System Synchronization) received the IN-TERSPEECH Travel Awards on the technical quality of their paper "When voices get emotional: A study of emotionenhanced memory and impairment during emotional prosody exposure" at the Interspeech Conference 2014, Singapore (September 14-17, 2014)

Edouard Gentaz (with David Sander and Didier Grandjean as co-applicants) (project From Elicitation to Emotional Response: Neural Mechanisms of Patterning and System Synchronization, and project Affective Relevance: Nature, Determinants and Effects) received an SNF grant on "Development of the discrimination of emotions during infancy" (2014-2017)

Didier Grandjean (main applicant Prof Olivier Renaud) (project From Elicitation to Emotional Response: Neural Mechanisms of Patterning and System Synchronization) received an SNF grant on "Time, frequency and time-varying causality measures in neuroscience" (2014-2015). Didier Grandjean (with Marc-André Rappaz, Haute Ecole de Musique de Genève) (project From Elicitation to Emotional Response: Neural Mechanisms of Patterning and System Synchronization) received an SNF grant on the "Impact of gesture and conceptual metaphor dynamics on the production and perception of musical emotions" (2014-2017).

Didier Grandjean (project From Elicitation to Emotional Response: Neural Mechanisms of Patterning and System Synchronization) received an SNF grant on "Musical performances and body expressivity: from production to perception" (2014-2017).

Federico Lauria (project Emotion, Attention and Value) has received the SNF Grant "Early Postdoc.Mobility" for the project "Death and Powers. A Modal Approach to the Value of Death and Related Issues" (2015-2017).

David Sander and Patrik Vuilleumier received a grant to continue their collaboration with Firmenich S.A. in the context of the project "EmOdor - Investigating odor-elicited emotions" (2014-2018).

Franziska Tschan (with Guido Beldi and Daniel Candinas) (project Work and Emotions: Experiencing and Regulating Emotions, Issues of Self-involvement, and Relationships to Well-being and Performance) in collaboration with Norbert Semmer received an SNF Grant on the "Impact of structured communication in the operating room on surgical site infections" (2015 – 2018)

Patrik Vuilleumier and Dimitri van de Ville (project Brain Networks of Emotions and their Influence on Cognitive Processes) received a NARSAD grant (National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia and Depression) from the Brain & Behavior Research Foundation (USA) on emotion regulation in mood disorders (2014)

#### **Major achievements**

Nicola Jacobshagen (project Work and Emotions: Experiencing and Regulating Emotions, Issues of Self-Involvement, and Relationships to Well-Being and Performance) won the 2014 LUKS Award (Lehrpreis der Universität Konstanz von Studierenden) for excellence in teaching.

Olga Klimecki (project Affective Relevance: Nature, Determinants and Effects) was awarded the 2014 Society for Social Neuroscience Early Career Contributions Award. Olga Klimecki gave her award lecture on Friday, November 14, 2014 in Washington D.C. Leonie Koban (project Brain Networks of Emotions and their Influence on Cognitive Processes) was awarded the 2014 Amiticia Prize for her PhD thesis on "Social conflict and action monitoring" by the LNDS (Lemanic Neuroscience Doctoral School).

Norbert K. Semmer (project Work and Emotions: Experiencing and Regulating Emotions, Issues of Self-Involvement, and Relationships to Well-Being and Performance) has been appointed as member of the scientific advisory council of the "Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (BAUA)", Germany

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#### New books



Prof Patrizia Lombardo has published "Memory and Imagination in Film Scorsese, Lynch, Jarmusch, Van Sant".

In this book she proposes a new understanding of 'cinephilia' as the interplay of the memory and the imagination of both filmmakers and spectators. The book is published by Palgrave.



Dr Julie Peron and Prof Didier Grandjean have edited a special edition of the journal Cortex entitled "What does intracerebral recording tell us about emotions ?" describing the state of the art in the iEEG studies of intracerebral electrophysiological activity during emotion processing in its very broadest sense. The book is published by Elsevier.



Prof Joël Billieux, Dr Julien Rochat and Prof Martial Van der Linden have edited « L'impulsivité: ses facettes, son évaluation et son expression clinique. » The book is published by Mardaga.

#### **Completed PhDs**

Annick Ettlin successfully defended her PhD thesis on "Mallarmé et l'existence littéraire" on September 27, 2014 under the supervision of Patrizia Lombardo.

Chaohui Guo successfully defended her PhD thesis on the "Neuroeconomics of charitable giving and learning" on the 6th of February, 2014 under the direction of Ernst Fehr.

Maria Undine Kottwitz successfully defended her PhD thesis on "The social context of work-related stress and markers of the bio-physiological stress reaction" on October 3, 2014 under the direction of Norbert K. Semmer.

Bastiaan Oud successfully defended his PhD thesis on "Essays in Behavioral Economics: Research at the Intersection of Psychology and Economics" on October 17, 2014, under the supervision of Ernst Fehr.

Julien Zanetta successfully defended his PhD thesis on "Baudelaire, la mémoire et les arts" on June 20, 2014 under the direction of Patrizia Lombardo

#### Social Media

Follow us on Twitter : @NCCRAffectiveScience





#### Et moi, émois et nous!

(September 2014 - June 2015). The Théâtre du Grütli of Geneva invited the researchers of the NCCR Affective Sciences to reflect on the plays presented throughout the theatrical season. The

texts drafted by the researchers are currently available on the website of the Theatre Grütli and are distributed before the plays. Meetings with the public are also scheduled throughout the season.

ÉMOTIONS – une histoire naturelle

(Muséum d'histoire naturelle de Neuchâtel, November 30, 2014 -November 29, 2015).

The NCCR Affective Sciences has developed in close collaboration with the Museum of Natural History of Neuchâtel a major exhibition entitled "Emotions...naturally". Workshops, Conferences and public events are planned throughout the year.

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Alpine Brain Imaging Meeting (January 11 to 15, 2015). The 10th edition of ABIM takes place in Champéry (Switzerland).

The program and details are available at https:// medweb4.unige.ch/labnic/ABIM/ Four conference days on brain imaging approaches to emotion and motivation with prestigious invited speakers in affective neuroscience from all around the world are planned. Moreover, a special social anniversary program has been organized to mark this special edition. Colloquium "Indignation" (March 20-21, 2015) Organized in Geneva by the project "Contempt in Literature" with Damien Nelis, Julien Deonna and Frédéric Minner.

**Colloquium "Baudelaire"** (April 17, 2015) organized in Geneva by the project "Contempt in Literature" with Julien Zanetta.

Colloquium "Montage - Archives" (April 24-25, 2015) organized in Geneva by the project "Contempt in Literature" with the HEAD (Haute Ecole d'Art et Design de Genève).



ISRE 2015 (July 8-10, 2015) The next edition of the conference of the International Society for Research on Emotion (ISRE 2015) is being organized by the Swiss Center for Affective Sciences and will take place in Geneva from July 8 to 10, 2015

Brain Awareness week in Geneva (March 16-20, 2014)

The NCCR Affective Sciences researchers will take part in this major public event that promotes local and international research on affective neuroscience.

http://www.semaineducerveau.ch/





## NEWS

#### Publications

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#### Affect & Emotion

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