The origins of morality are deeply rooted in evolution and human development. The question is how does morality come about, and when does it become conscious? I propose that the pressure and necessity of cooperation leads children toward moral agency. Lack of cooperation entails social exclusion, which undermines the need to affiliate and amplifies the deep-seated and universal fear of rejection. I suggest that cooperation, the foundation of human sociality, depends on three innate capacities: a sense of self as agent, a sense of self as others, and a sense of mutuality with others. Such development leads children from approximately five years of age onward to take an ethical stance as a moral agent situated in a world made of shared norms and values.

For more information, please visit events.psych.missouri.edu/lecture-series/

Philippe Rochat received his doctorate from the University of Geneva, in 1984, where he was trained by Jean Piaget and his close collaborators. Rochat then completed post-doctoral work at Brown University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Johns Hopkins University. He held a faculty position at the University of Massachusetts and joined the faculty at Emory University in the 1990s. A 2006–07 Guggenheim fellow, Rochat has published and edited six books as well as more than 100 scholarly articles on infant and child development. The main focus of his research is the early sense of self, emerging self-concept, the development of social cognition and relatedness, and the emergence of a moral sense during the preschool years in children from all over the world. His research emphasizes differences in young children growing up in highly contrasted cultural environments, as well as highly contrasted socio-economic circumstances.