



2nd JEAN PIAGET CONFERENCES

Infant development from Piaget to today

Geneva, Uni Mail, June 20-21, 2016

Tuesday morning, June 20 , 2016

10h00

Paul Bloom, Yale University

Just Babies: The origins of good and evil

Abstract:

One of the most surprising discoveries in contemporary developmental psychology is that babies apparently possess a rich moral sense. They distinguish between good and bad acts and prefer good characters over bad ones. They feel compassion for others, and even possess a primitive sense of fairness and justice. Based on these findings, many scholars have argued that the difference between baby morality and adult morality is slight—a matter of degree, not of kind. I will suggest that this is mistaken. It turns out that the morality of a baby has a very different character than that of an adult. In some regards, it is *better*. Certain intuitions that only adults possess, having to do with the moralization of purity and disgust, make us worse people—we were better off as babies. In other regards, though, our innate morality is limited, tragically so. Piaget and Kohlberg were correct to maintain that an impartial and disinterested moral system—one that takes the perspective of an “impartial spectator”—is the product of a lengthy developmental process. There is an important sense, then, in which we are not moral from the very start.