

yes. With certain forms of autism, empathy is lessened or largely absent. In psychopaths, empathy is controlled: Psychopaths can sense what someone else is feeling, not be affected themselves, and then manipulate the other for their own benefit or enjoyment.

Can the mirror system be affected by how one is raised, by one's family life and peer relations? Does one's political morality correlate with one's capacity for empathy—that is, with the operation of the mirror neuron and well-being systems? That is being investigated, and preliminary results suggest that there is a difference between extreme progressives and extreme conservatives, with extreme conservatives showing less activation in their empathy system.

Since all thoughts and feelings are physical, a matter of brain circuitry, it is not surprising that moral sensibilities should be constituted by physical brain structures like those we have just been discussing. These brain structures form the neural basis not only of your own moral sensibilities, but also of your views on what an ideal person ought to be.

The Ideal Person

What should an ideal person be like? Conservatives and progressives have largely opposite views, given their different views of morality. Biconceptuals have different views as well, depending on how their moral views are divided up: biconceptuals who are largely conservative will tend to have a conservative view of what people should be like, and biconceptuals who are largely progressive will tend to have a progressive view of what people should be like. Or, biconceptuals that are less extreme may believe that an ideal person is biconceptual in the same way they are, with the same distribution of conservative and progressive views.

The progressive (nurturant parent) moral system maintains a delicate balance between the empathy and the personal well-being systems. At its core is empathy for others and the responsibility to act on that empathy, but it is modulated by the proviso that you can't take care of anyone else if you're not taking care of yourself. That is, it centers on empathy and includes both