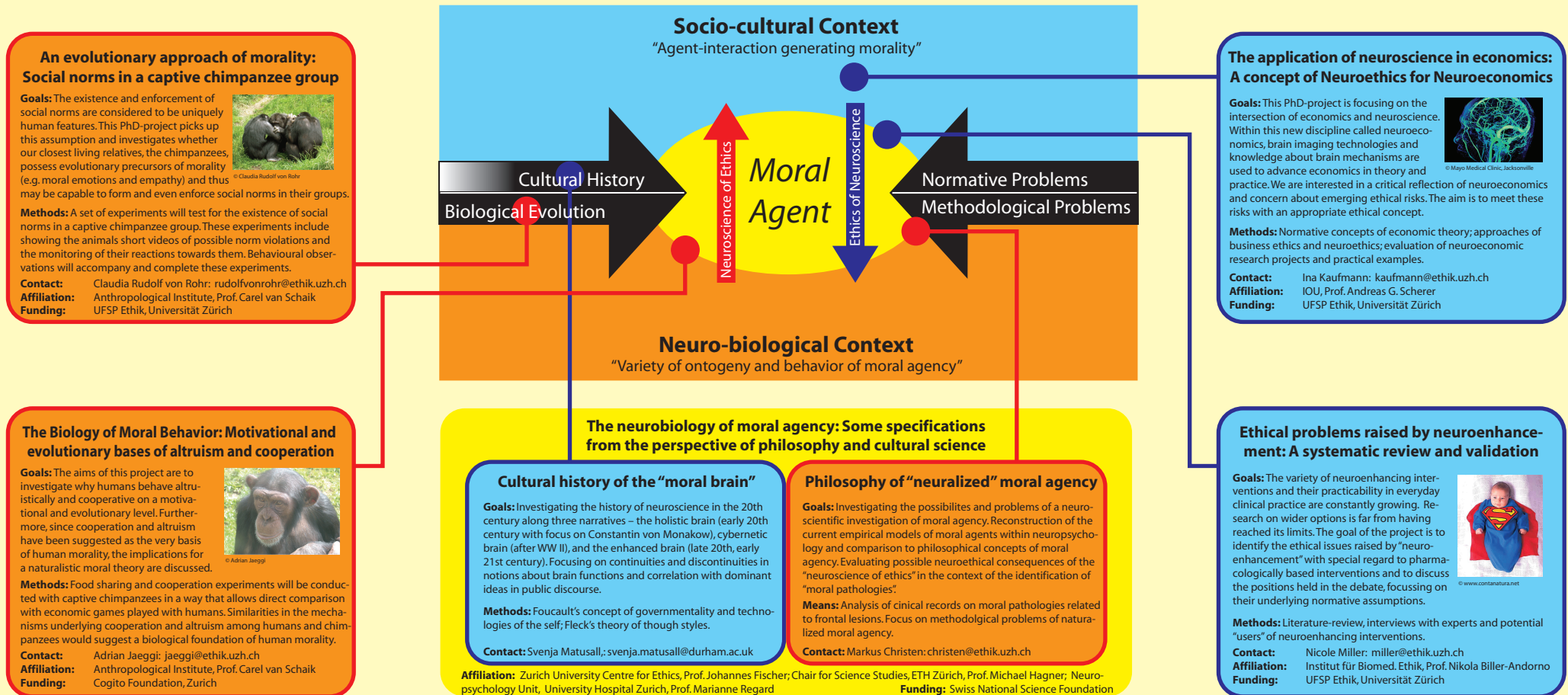


Naturalizing moral agency - prospects and perils

Markus Christen, Adrian Jaeggi, Ina Kaufmann, Svenja Matusall, Nicole Miller, Claudia Rudolf von Rohr

The search for “biological foundations” of moral behavior has become a relevant topic in social cognitive neuroscience and behavior science. In particular, the role of moral emotions [1], neuronal mechanisms of decision making [2], dispositions and behaviors like empathy [3], trust [4] and cooperation [5], and finally “moral-like” behaviors in non-human primates [6] were analyzed. These studies focus – implicitly or explicitly – major components of moral agency and are thus part of a naturalization project (“neuroscience of ethics” [7]), which challenges philosophical ethics and raise the problem whether new ethical questions (“ethics of neuroscience”) emerge out of this research program. We present six research projects that address some of the question raised by naturalizing moral agency. The projects follow the intention, that the difficult methodological and conceptual questions that arise in the project of naturalizing moral agency require a close cooperation of philosophers and empirical scientists. Furthermore – as the motivation of this naturalization project has often a societal technological motivation – neuroethical question that emerge out of this type of research should not be diminished [8]. The projects are part of the new graduate program of the URPP Ethics of the University Zurich, established in March 2007. Below, we outline the general framework in which our projects are embedded in.



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