



UNIVERSITY OF  
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Cambridge Forum for  
Children's Emotional Wellbeing  
Faculty of Education



## Zero Degrees of Empathy: A New Theory of Human Cruelty

Simon Baron-Cohen

Professor at The University of Cambridge and  
Director of Cambridge's internationally renowned Autism Research Centre

Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2012, 10.00-12.30  
The Donald McIntyre Building, 184 Hills Road

World-expert Simon Baron-Cohen presents new discoveries on the importance of empathy, and the problems with evil.

Simon Baron-Cohen, expert in autism and developmental psychopathology, has always wanted to isolate and understand the factors that cause people to treat others as if they were mere objects. In this session he proposes a radical shift, turning the focus away from evil and on to the central factor, empathy. Unlike the concept of evil, he argues, empathy has real explanatory power.

Putting empathy under the microscope he explores four new ideas: firstly, that we all lie somewhere on an empathy spectrum, from high to low, from six degrees to zero degrees. Secondly that, deep within the brain lies the 'empathy circuit'. How this circuit functions determines where we lie on the empathy spectrum. Thirdly, that empathy is not only something we learn but that there are also genes associated with empathy. And fourthly, while a lack of empathy leads to mostly negative results, is it always negative?

Full of original research, *Zero Degrees of Empathy* presents a new way of understanding what it is that leads individuals down negative paths, and challenges all of us to consider replacing the idea of evil with the idea of empathy-erosion.

**Simon Baron-Cohen** is Professor at Cambridge University in the fields of psychology and psychiatry. He is also the Director of Cambridge's internationally-renowned Autism Research Centre. He has carried out research into social neuroscience over a career spanning twenty years. *The Essential Difference* (Penguin 2003) has been translated in over a dozen languages and put forward the theory of 'the extreme male brain'. His most recent book is *Zero Degrees of Empathy*.

FEES: £20 Members

£35 Non-members

For a booking form please email Lieke van Bree at lv264@cam.ac.uk