



Neuroethics in Neurosciences Series: Three Visions of Diversity in Neuroethics

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Nearly five years have passed since the inaugural meeting of the International Neuroethics Society, and just over a decade since the field's official date of birth. Now seems an apt time to reflect on where we in neuroethics have been and where we might yet go. We are two students who have worked at the National Core for Neuroethics and have been involved in the field and active in the Society since our undergraduate years. We write to offer our perspectives on the various meanings of "diversity" for neuroethics: what it might look like, where we risk faltering, what we could aspire to.

Vision 1: Intellectual Diversity

Although we share the opinion that neuroethics stands as a field of scholarship in its own right, we do view it as an unusual one. Neuroethics consists of a set of issues, questions, and concerns that form a meeting ground for a variety of disciplines. The field has been described as dealing with two areas of inquiry: (1) the ethics of neuroscience and (2) the neuroscience of ethics (Roskies 2002). That maxim serves as a useful summary, but we prefer an alternate conception, one presenting the field as organized around two questions:

(1) How do we responsibly wield and situate our increasing technological power over the brain: in research, in medicine, in law and policy, and so on? (2) How might we human beings understand ourselves and our societies in an era where discoveries about the brain complicate fundamental concepts like self, identity, consciousness, action, responsibility, choice, even right and wrong themselves (Reiner 2011)?

The topical focus, however, only constitutes half of what makes neuroethics distinctive. To see why, it will be illustrative to consider the history of bioethics. Neuroethics is not bioethics, but the former has grown up in the shadow of the latter. Bioethics began as a richly interdisciplinary endeavor. Into the 1970s and 80s, though, it became nearly a wholly-owned subsidiary of academic philosophy (Wilson 2013). During this time, although valuable work was done, the field was criticized for myopia. It was not until the "empirical turn" in the 90s that bioethics would truly return to a "big tent" approach.

Neuroethics, too, has started off on an inclusive foot. But we would do well to be particularly mindful of similar dangers – of allowing the perspectives, assumptions, or methodologies of any one discipline to domi-

nate the field. For neuroethics, the stakes are heightened because different disciplines tend toward different visions of the endeavor, with many (though not all) of the more critical and deflationary accounts of neuroscience's implications coming from scholars in the humanities, and many (though not all) of the more enthusiastic accounts coming from philosophy and from the natural and social sciences. This worry is not defused by the ease with which a neuroscientific angle can be infused into other disciplines — e.g., neuroeconomics, neurolaw, neuroaesthetics — because it is not the mushrooming of these crossover topics that makes neuroethics interdisciplinary. Rather, what makes neuroethics interdisciplinary is the way that it draws together perspectives from diverse fields to comment on topics like neuroeconomics, neurolaw, et cetera. Seen in this light, neuroethics appears as a *symposium* — a space where scholars of all stripes might work together on important issues.

We urge everyone in the field to view and treat it as such. In particular, we encourage active outreach to bring in as many disciplinary perspectives — both from within and beyond academia — as possible. Neuroethics will flourish as never before when our meetings attract more than token representation of thinkers from a panoply of departments and occupations: historians to impart the lessons of past interactions between science and society; scholars of literature and media to furnish insight into how neuroscience is embodied in the public imagination; political theorists to consider how a neuroscientifically informed view can (or cannot) inform institutional design and good governance; statisticians to challenge and improve the quality our empirical work; policymakers to help guide our ethos of impacting the world; journalists to inform and engage the public — the list continues. Scholars from the humanities would be particularly well suited to comment insightfully on the second half of our formulation of the topical agenda for neuroethics (viz. “how

shall we understand ourselves in a neurocentric age?”). Neuroethics (as well as other neuro-topics that may grow and splinter into their own fields) will succeed in large part based on its ability to cultivate an open space of intellectual diversity in which all participants are able to listen beyond their own backgrounds. We feel that the International Neuroethics Society has made a commendable start in this direction, even as we perceive room for further improvement.

In reviewing the work of the field thus far, a nagging concern regarding topical diversity arises: neuroethics is still neglecting some key issues. Certainly, the field has done quite well in analyzing important topics — imaging, enhancement, free will, responsibility, neurotechnology, dementia, neurolaw, and incidental findings (to name but a few). Yet weighty issues fall under the mandate of the field that have received comparatively little attention: drug policy, cultural neuroscience, medicalization and psychiatric diagnosis, novel consumer technology, neuroscience in the public sphere, moral psychology, and more. To keep from running in conceptual circles, we should actively solicit discussions that are not yet canonical. Indeed, neuroethics has a proven track record of burgeoning topical diversity — we simply want to make sure that this tradition of boundary-pushing continues into the field's second decade.

Vision 2: Political Diversity

While the metaphor is imperfect, fields like bioethics and neuroethics are comparable in some ways to regulatory agencies. They observe and comment on the activities of professionals. They issue assessments and recommendations that shape particular spheres of human activity. And they are vulnerable to capture — the predicament in which a body advances the interests of the domains it “regulates” rather than serving the public interest. Arguably, something akin to capture befell bioethics during its philosophy-

dominated days; the field was accused of being little more than the public-relations wing of medicine (Wilson 2013), and such allegations have never entirely subsided (De Vries and Keirns 2009, Turner 2004). Neuroethics may run a similar risk. The promise of profit in areas like neuromarketing or the pharmaceutical industry could lead technological pioneers to seek out too-cozy relationships with cash-starved research groups; if this were to happen, even neuroethicists wholly free of conflicts of interest would suffer by association, so everyone ought to care. Likewise, even financially independent commentators in neuroethics would risk the appearance of corruption if their assessments of ethically and politically contentious new technologies were to amount to uncritical endorsements. Of course, overcorrecting for this potentiality would also backfire: neuroethics would fade into tiresome irrelevance if it were to become nothing more than the dedicated opposition lobby to any neurotechnological development – in other words, we cannot style ourselves as the “ethics police.” But relative to the allure of financial stability, no equivalent force is pulling neuroethics in an obstructionist direction. Nor can we wave away this concern by naively insisting that people working in a field with “ethics” in the name are therefore any less susceptible to conflicts of interest (Schwitzgebel, Rust, 2013).

If neuroethics is to operate from a place of transparency and equipoise between competing interests, it *must* not remain apolitical. We do not mean that it must take sides in the broader political culture war; rather, we urge neuroethicists to recognize that the field has its own internal politics – that is, a set of competing visions about what is healthy for the field, whose interests to favor, which ideas are treated as axiomatic, how research agendas are prioritized, and why the field exists. It is crucial that neuroethicists engage in discussion and, yes, disagreement about these competing visions. Failing to do so will not preserve a state of comfortable neutral-

ity. Rather, it will leave neuroethics vulnerable to covert colonization by whichever ideology happens to be most natural, most effective, or – worse yet – most profitable.

The importance of mature – even uncomfortable – political discussion as a prophylaxis against capture further reinforces the need to bring diverse intellectual perspectives to the table. In particular, neuroethics needs humanities scholars with expertise in the art of critique to foster such exchange. Much credit is owed to the “critical neuroscience” movement for pioneering some important lines of thought in this regard. Nonetheless, we feel more work remains to be done.

Vision 3: Identity Diversity

We have thus far placed heavy emphasis on intellectual diversity in neuroethics. Diversity along other axes, however, is no less important. Here the field has already made some admirable strides. Neuroethics in general boasts a strong global presence, and its professional Society is international in more than just name thanks in large part to the tireless advocacy of Judy Illes. The field also boasts an impressive array of women in founding and leadership positions, with more likely to emerge thanks to the commendable work of the Neuroethics Women Leaders group. Nonetheless, more must be done. Neuroethics at least *appears* to remain overwhelmingly Anglophone, white, upper class, neurotypical, and so on (we do not presume to be able to comprehensively list the important axes of diversity) – although demographic data to verify that this is the case would be most welcome.

As neuroethicists, we owe our important endeavor the epistemological favor of seeking out marginalized and minority perspectives. As two white men writing this article from a position of privilege, we hesitate to imply that such perspectives are actually in short supply; rather, we prefer to challenge ourselves and our colleagues to seek out these perspectives

and signal-boost them. The questions we address are too important to risk missing a key angle due to an insufficiently diverse set of lived experiences informing our work.

This is an especially pressing concern because neuroethics deals extensively with questions of normality, mental illness, moral psychology, (neuro)biological essentialism, cultural stigma, research ethics, and the social implications of drug and technology policy, all of which are topics of tremendous consequence in the history of majoritarian mistreatment of people at society's margins. Moreover, and more fundamentally, we view ethics as an endeavor that requires critique – and thus critical perspectives – to function properly. No set of *ex ante* ethical guidelines will ever fully succeed in yielding ethically unproblematic outcomes; the project is always already a work in progress. We need, for example, work in the tradition of Corde-

lia Fine, whose admirable efforts to explicate the problematic assumptions informing studies on gender differences elegantly demonstrate why ethical research merely begins, and certainly does not end, with the approval of institutional review boards. Strengthening neuroethics in this regard will require more outreach, and more limelight for boundary-pushing work. Moreover, it will require more effortful inclusion of minority perspectives into the cornerstones of the field.

Conclusion

Here, we have offered three views of diversity for neuroethics: intellectual, political, and identity. Given the brilliance and open-mindedness displayed in the field thus far, we are hopeful that our call will shape its future. Indeed, we know that by working together, we can all turn these visions into reality.

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Biographies

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Editor's Column

Many of you are preparing for the upcoming Society for Neuroscience Meetings. The meetings this year will be held in San Diego from November 9-13. This is always a highlight of the year for me and we at David Kopf Instruments as we look forward to seeing many of you at the Kopf booth. Please make it a point to stop by the booth and see the latest instruments and innovations in the stereotaxic line. David Kopf Instruments manufactures the largest complete line of stereotaxic equipment available.

This issue of the *Carrier* is another in the Neuroethics in Neuroscience series. Nicholas Fitz and Roland Nadler have presented in this article three views of diversity in neuroethics. Their arguments for increased diversity in the field of neuroethics is one which we need to look at carefully. If this rather new field of endeavor is to survive and live up to its promise it must carefully guard against decreased diversity and overly circumscribed views. I hope you enjoy the article and its viewpoints.

We also want to mention a very important meeting that occurs just before the Society for Neuroscience Meetings. The 2013 annual meeting of the International Neuroethics Society (INS) will be held November 7-9 at the San Diego Marriott Marquis and Marina. This very interesting meeting boasts an international speaker list and a very interesting group of attendees. There are major lectures, discussion sessions, and a poster session. The Society awards three travel awards for poster presenters. I am pleased to sponsor one of these travel awards. I would urge you to consider joining the INS and attending the meetings. For more information please visit www.Neuroethicssociety.org.

David Kopf Instruments sponsors the annual David Kopf Lecture on Neuroethics. This year the lecture will be held on Monday, November 11 from 10 to 11:10 AM. The speaker will be Nita Farahany, JD, PhD from Duke University. Her topic will be "Blaming the Brain: Behavioral Sciences in the Courtroom." This will be an extraordinarily interesting and important presentation. Increasingly, the data that we as neuroscientists generate are influencing court decisions. Behaviors that used to be almost taken for granted are now being blamed on problems of brain function. Dr. Farahany is admirably suited to talk about this topic. We urge you to attend this extremely important lecture.

On the Florida front, this year so far has been extremely quiet in terms of hurricanes and other bad weather. It begins to look now as though the hurricane season is heating up but hopefully we will be able to avoid any direct hits again this year. We have just returned from spending two months in the Midwest at our condominium visiting our grandchildren. Incidental to this visit of grandchildren is, of course, visits with their parents. It is truly fun to see how these 5 kids are developing. Their ages range from 6 to 10, so they will still talk to grandma and grandpa. We hope that will not change for a while yet. A big change for me this summer was having cataract surgery and the lenses replaced with toric lenses. I had no idea how much visual function I had lost over the years, especially the appreciation for color. The world now looks a lot different.

Again, we look forward to seeing you at the Society meetings so please stop by the Kopf booth and talk with the wonderful Kopf people.

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