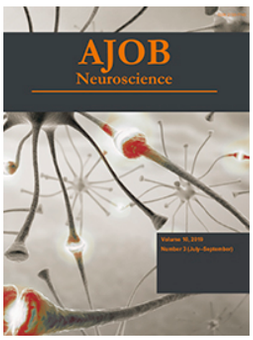

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Ethical Contexts for the Future of Neuroethics

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with one's parents. While the Chinese do not reject Brandt's values, the relative weight they assign to these values may differ substantially.

It is arguable whether or not the Chinese value system is adaptive. But even if it were, it may nevertheless provide a critical challenge to what may be an overemphasis on individual rights and autonomy. Garret Hardin, in discussing the so-called "tragedy of the commons," observed that

> Every new enclosure of the commons involves the infringement of somebody's personal liberty … cries of "rights" and "freedom" fill the air. But what does "freedom" mean? When men mutually agreed to pass laws against robbing, mankind became more free, not less so. Individuals locked into the logic of the commons are free only to bring on universal ruin. (Hardin 1968, 1248)

Sometimes personal liberty and self-driven choice have to be regulated in order to provide freedom. Those, like myself, who were enculturated in the West may not understand Hardin's point as deeply, on a visceral level, as the average Chinese citizen. Consequently, we may be less well off if we fail to take on board her perspective.

I end with another of Hardin's observations:

> The morality of an act is a function of the state of the system at the time it is performed. Using the commons as a cesspool does not harm the general public under frontier conditions, because there is no public; the same behavior in a metropolis is unbearable. (Hardin 1968, 1245)

We are living in a world that is increasingly interconnected, where an increasing subset of resources can no longer be treated as a commons. Food gathering and land for waste disposal are but a few of the examples of resources that must be tightly regulated and controlled in order to ensure global well-being. Given the state of the world and the size of populations, among other things, it is an open question whether or not China's framework of values is the best (even if imperfect) moral alternative under current conditions. That being said, the point of this brief commentary is not to articulate and defend the Chinese framework of values. It is simply to make room on the table for non-Western voices and, perhaps, to more effectively heed Kellmeyer and colleagues' call for greater perspectival diversity. ■

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Ethical Contexts for the Future of Neuroethics

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The "state-of-the-field" assessment titled "Neuroethics at 15: The Current and Future Environment for Neuroethics" (Kellmeyer et al., for the Emerging Issues Task Force, International Neuroethics Society 2019) highlights a variety of issues of an ethical character. This assessment's selectivity and relative constraint, within the practical bounds of a short essay, could not be avoided. Any number of possible and potentially anticipatable social, legal, and moral concerns may come to mind, and in light of this, its choice of representative problems is both timely and helpful. The implications for human welfare, and humanity itself, from advances in brain sciences, neurotechnologies, and translational techniques can be safely predicted to be deep and far-

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reaching; thus, the academic and applied activities of neuroethics are—and will continue to be—dynamic and increasing at an accelerating pace and widening scope.

In our view, an overlooked matter should be raised and never allowed to fall into neglect, namely, the status of ethics. We are not complaining that ethical worries are omitted from this report—far from it. Warnings about potential violations of important moral values and appeals to selected ethical ideals are presented in abundance. But we would like to point out that an impartial observer of current neuroethics could justifiably think that the "ethical environment" for neuroethics, now and for the foreseeable future, is hospitable to both Western moral absolutism and tolerant moral relativism. If viewed through a certain lens, the report might lend credence to the stage-setting roles played by these contrary ethical standpoints. It gives due obeisance to "underlying values" such as human dignity, well-being, justice, personal autonomy, and personal privacy. Yet these values only attain their full ethical meaning and paramount status within particular nations as a consequence of ethical deliberations upon events of the past 80 years (i.e., the improbities and atrocities brought to light by the Nuremberg "Doctors' Trial") relative to Western philosophical precepts of the last three centuries. Do these deserve universal prioritization and overriding precedence, among all the values and ideals promulgated by ethical cultures around the world? One might regard that question to be philosophically important without imagining that neuroethics has anything at all do with its answer. We disagree.

What then does neuroethics have to do with ethics? Perhaps ethics can only be a significant part of the demanding environment for neuroethics, requiring its dutiful compliance. However, with respect to any technology-based endeavor in general, the iterative modification and adaptation of the environment and the organisms in it (including *Homo sapiens*) has become a thoroughly human enterprise. Thus, the possibility that ethics will be adjusted by neuroethics cannot be ruled out in advance. We urge the view that this prospect is not only possible, but inevitable. The grounds for this view lie in neuroethics and its defining purpose.

At its core, neuroethics is an interdisciplinary field for deliberations about (1) scientific investigations into neurocognitive processes, particularly those involved with capacities for sociality and morality, and (2) ethical, legal, and social issues generated by brain research and its varied applications. At first glance, a close relationship between these tasks seems straightforward. The first assignment is about "the science of morality," while the second addresses "the morality of science." Commonalities at this core of neuroethics are obvious: science and morality (Farah 2012; Illes and Bird 2006; Levy 2011). However, the objectives of science and ethics are dissimilar, and the science of morality and the ethics of science may not be compatible. Perhaps ethics has no need of science while morality gets misunderstood by science, according to the sorts of long-standing objections raised by philosophy and theology. Ethical supervision of science and technology with ethics has less opposition, although proponents of fast progress often complain about conservative restraints, and conservative proponents frequently complain about hasty and liberal engagements of science and technology.

Suspicions about agendas underlying neuroethics grow on all sides. Is theorizing about morality to be liberated by empirical science from philosophical and theological conjecture? Scientific discoveries are revealing significant facts about genetic, neurologic, and cognitive processes of life, despite objections claiming that essences of identity, mind, and soul are beyond the scope and competence of science. While metaphysically anachronistic, such protests are perennially devoted to important values about human life, such as psychological and moral norms. Living in a responsible and right manner was never a matter waiting for science's ethical instruction. What new agenda is actually served by regarding humans only in terms of weights and measures? The reduction of good judgment and moral rightness to brain processes and behavioral consequences is the goal of materialistic utilitarianism. Letting utilitarian criteria supervise brain-related investigations and inventions would allow rapid adoptions of technoscience in the name of individual benefit and social betterment. Useful innovation is about satisfying wants and needs from that standpoint, and their reality and potency cannot be denied. Human drives and desires have neurobiological and psychological grounds that are more evident to scientific view than changing perspectives of personal rights or social justice. If the agenda is to comprehend the person and the mind through understanding the brain, will anything valuable be overlooked? Perhaps, but what we believe cannot—nor should not—be overlooked is the way that assigning the study of morality to neuroscience cannot guarantee that applications of neuroscience will be ethical (Giordano and Benedikter 2012).

A confusing scene of contentious agendas is not a promising inauguration of a reputable academic field. Critiques from many directions are questioning whether neuroethics is a credible intellectual resource, or even a coherent academic area (Conrad and De Vries 2011; Vidal and Piperberg 2017). Dividing neuroethics into independent areas of study, or distributing tasks of neuroethics among other disciplines might alleviate critical worries. But we disagree that those concerns have hegemonic cogency. The broad purview assigned to the field of neuroethics provides ample room for discussions and deliberations about humanity's technoscientific and ethical future, keeping them in dialogue and dialectic rather than discord. Neuroethics is needed now because ethical implications for society raised by neuroscience and neurotechnology cannot be an issue considered separately from scientific implications of self-understanding as persons bearing moral worth and dignity. No other field

among the humanities and social sciences, whether traditionally disciplinary or newly interdisciplinary, is designed to explore that convergence.

Neuroethics cannot avoid entanglements with morality, as intellectual progress implies a co-developing relationship with the environing problematic conditions, including ethics itself, which demand neuroethical deliberation(s). The future ethical environment for neuroethics will be interestingly different—in no small part due to the transformative work of neuroethics. The assessment under discussion, "Neuroethics at 15," seems open to that likelihood. It acknowledges how ethical values, including fundamental ideals, are not as static as moral absolutists imagine: "The ways in which these values are understood and applied shift over time" (104). However, that observation by itself affords insufficient guidance to the contemporary field of neuroethics, which in its currency and authenticity need not or should not solely rely on ancient Greek, traditional African, or medieval Chinese ideas about such values. The way that neuroethics is largely aligned at present with some other society and century does not signal that ethics is safely aloof from the mire of relativism. Relativism is also on display in devout respect shown for values that happen to be revered in (for example) the America of late modernity. Why couldn't neuroethics be guided toward respecting a different sets of values from other contemporary cultures? Absolutism is not achieved merely by proclaiming a preference that the values of one's own society prevail over values of other societies.

Ethical values shift and blend over time, exposing both ethical absolutism and relativism as inadequate theories. Short-term flexibility and long-term fluidity is a sign of moral progress, not degeneration. Accordingly, we commend this report's hopes for international consensus and universal ethical standards, as long as those inclusive ends are not pursued by hegemonic means (Lanzilao et al. 2013; Lombera and Illes 2009). Still, unavoidable questions will remain: What does neuroethics have to do with that perennial philosophical quest for a universal ethics? How should neuroethics conduct its advisory work in the meantime? Perhaps neuroethics could help advance consensus on global ethical principles, or neuroethics may have some special expertise for discerning humanity-wide ethical rules irrespective of culture or geopolitics (Shook and Giordano 2014). The ethical environment for neuroethics will not acquire further clarity until the full implications of neuroscience and neuroethics for understanding morality become clearer.

What does seem clear to us at present is this: Interdisciplinary undertakings for embracing both science and ethics through mutual dialogue and coordinated deliberations are not efforts to be delayed or dismissed. As we all look to survey the complex environment for neuroethics, we should agree that this relatively new field is timely, necessary, and necessarily flexible. ■

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