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BRAINSTORM

A newsletter about ethics, neuroscience, and society
Un bulletin sur l'éthique, les neurosciences et la société

Brainstorm

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Profile | Profil



Nina Di Pietro, Ph.D., is a faculty member of the Psychology Department at Douglas College in British Columbia. Formerly, she held the role of Research Associate at the National Core for Neuroethics at the University of British Columbia (UBC). At the Core, she conducted research and co-managed the Neuroethics Program for NeuroDevNet Inc. Her work centered on identifying the unique ethical and social challenges faced by stakeholders who are affected by neurodevelopmental conditions, including the researchers who study them. Her recent projects include identifying disparities in Canadian indigenous health research and care for persons living with neurodevelopmental conditions and addressing concerns related to rising off-label antipsychotic prescriptions for children and youth. Her leadership in this area has led to high impact publications, press coverage in the media, and a book with Elsevier Inc. where reviewers have described her as “a rising force in the field of neuroethics and developmental neuroscience”. Throughout her academic career, she has also engaged in science outreach by working with teachers to bring the excitement of scientific inquiry and debates in neuroscience and neuroethics into the classroom for K-12 students.

Statement on Neuroethics: I believe that ethical and philosophical inquiry about the nature of brain and mind is fundamental to basic neuroscience research. Excluding neuroethics from the process of brain research would be the equivalent of climbing Mt Everest without stopping to contemplate the best route to the top or the meaning of the experience. As neuroscience is working to create the tools to get us up the mountain, our role as neuroethicists is to ensure that each step we take along the way is securely anchored to the bedrock that defines our core values and beliefs.

Sample publications:

- Di Pietro NC, Illes J. (2014). Rising antipsychotic drug prescriptions for Canadian children and youth: cross-sectoral solutions for a multimodal problem. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 186(9): 653-654.
- Di Pietro NC, Illes J. (2014). Disparities in Canadian indigenous health research on neurodevelopmental disorders. *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*, 35(1): 74-81.
- Di Pietro NC, Mizgalewicz A, Johnson TW, Illes J. (2013). Disclosing incidental findings in brain research: the rights of minors in decision-making. *Journal of Magnetic Resonance Imaging*, 38(5): 1009-13.

If you would like to post any events, announcements, or news of interest please contact us at neuroethics@ircm.qc.ca (subject line: Brainstorm Events and Announcements)



Announcements | Annonces

Message from Judy Illies, International Neuroethics Society President

[On the activities of INS leadership, upcoming initiatives, and the 2016 INS meeting in San Diego, USA.](#)

Postdoctoral Researcher Position: Becoming good: Early intervention and moral development in child psychiatry (BeGOOD), University of Oxford

Deadline: June 3, 2016, [click here for more info.](#)

Call for Neuroethics Essays: International Neuroethics Society Student/Postdoc Essay Contest

Submission Deadline: June 15, 2016, [click here for more info.](#)

Call for Applicants: Visiting Scholar in Neuroethics 2016-2017 with the Neuroethics Research Unit in Montréal, Canada

Submission Deadline: June 15, 2016, [click here for more info.](#)

Call for Applicants: ESRC Studentships in association with the Centre for Health, Law and Emerging Technologies at Oxford University, UK

Submission Deadline: June 17, 2016, [click here for more info.](#)

Call for Papers: Diametros—An Online Journal of Philosophy Special Issue: Equality and Decency in Healthcare

Submission Deadline: December 15, 2016, [click here for more info.](#)

Events | Événements

Montreal Neuroethics Network Seminar: Kenneth Richman, PhD — “Autism and moral responsibility: if autism is mindblindness, when is it fitting to feel resentment toward autists?”

Date: June 9, 2016, 12-1pm, IRCM, Montreal, [click here for more info.](#)

Conference: International Congress on Personalized Health Care

Date: June 12-15, 2016, Montreal, [click here for more info.](#)

Conference: Third International Interdisciplinary Conference: Health and Mental Resilience, hosted by the Institute of Applied Psychology at the Jagiellonian University

Date: September 23-24, 2016, Krakow, Poland, [click here for more info.](#)

Coming soon to Oxford University Press

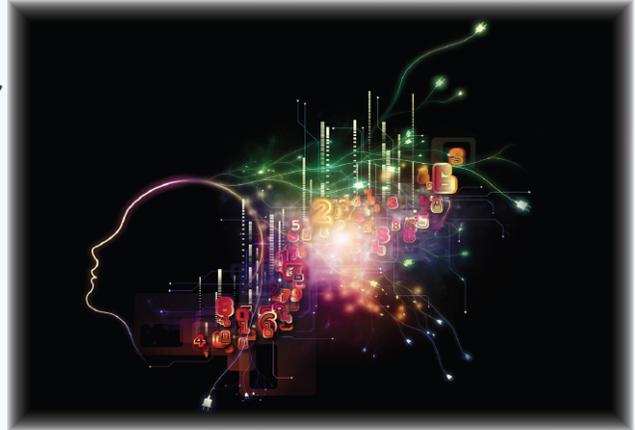
COGNITIVE ENHANCEMENT

Ethical and Policy Implications in International Perspectives

Edited by Fabrice Jotterand and Veljko Dubljevic

May 2016 • 432 pp. • 9780199396818 • Hardcover • \$79.95

There is a growing literature in neuroethics dealing with cognitive neuro-enhancement for healthy adults. However, discussions on this topic tend to focus on abstract theoretical positions while concrete policy proposals and detailed models are scarce. Furthermore, discussions appear to rely solely on data from the US or UK, while international perspectives are mostly non-existent. This volume fills this gap and addresses issues on cognitive enhancement comprehensively in three important ways: 1) it examines the conceptual implications stemming from competing points of view about the nature and goals of enhancement; 2) it addresses the ethical, social, and legal implications of neuroenhancement from an international and global perspective including contributions from scholars in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, and South America; and 3) it discusses and analyzes concrete legal issues and policy options tailored to specific contexts.



Editors:

FABRICE JOTTERAND is Associate Professor in the Department of Health Care Ethics at Regis University and Senior Researcher at the Institute for Biomedical Ethics, University of Basel, Switzerland. His scholarship and research interests focus on issues including moral enhancement, neurotechnologies and human identity, the use of neurotechnologies in psychiatry, medical professionalism, and moral and political philosophy.

VELJKO DUBLJEVIC is a Banting Postdoctoral Fellow in the Neuroethics research unit at IRCM and McGill University in Montreal, and an associate member of the International Centre for Ethics in the Sciences and Humanities, University of Tübingen. He obtained a PhD in political science (University of Belgrade), and after studying bioethics, philosophy, and neuroscience (University of Tübingen), he obtained a doctorate in philosophy (University of Stuttgart). His primary research focuses on ethics of neuroscience and technology and neuroscience of ethics. He has over 30 publications in moral, legal, and political philosophy, and in neuroethics.

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Human Brain Project

NEUROTECHNOLOGY AND DIRECT BRAIN COMMUNICATION

UPPSALA, 6 OCTOBER 2016

CRB invites you to a mini-symposium on new insights and responsibilities concerning speechless but communicative subjects.

Both infant brains and patients with disorders of consciousness (DOC) are at the forefront of contemporary neuroscience. The prospective use of neurotechnology to access mental states in these subjects, including neuroimaging, brain simulation, and brain computer interfaces, offers new opportunities for clinicians and researchers, but has also received specific attention from philosophical, scientific, ethical, and legal points of view.

The book *Neurotechnology and Direct Brain Communication*, edited by Michele Farisco and Kathinka Evers, offers the first systematic assessment of these issues, investigating the tools neurotechnology offers to care for verbally non-communicative subjects and suggesting a multidisciplinary approach to the ethical and legal implications of ordinary and experimental practices. Starting from the book, the mini-symposium will develop a multi-disciplinary discussion about these very intriguing and fascinating topics.

Moderator:

Kathinka Evers, Centre for Research Ethics and Bioethics (CRB), Uppsala University

Speakers:

Steven Laureys, University of Liege, Belgium

Georg Northoff, University of Ottawa, Canada

Anne-Marie Landtblom, Uppsala University, Sweden

When: October 6, 2016, 13:00-17:00

Where: BMC, Husargatan 3, Uppsala

No fee, but please register at www.crb.uu.se/neurotechnology

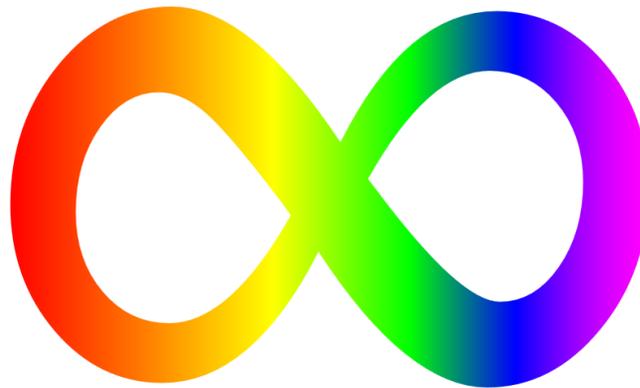
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International Neuroethics Forum

Autism and Moral Responsibility

Kenneth A. Richman, PhD

Autistic individuals (autists) tend to stick out a bit. This can be just because they are different from “neurotypicals.” It can be because they need to work harder or differently at determining what is socially expected and conforming to it. It can also be because they are not interested in determining what is socially expected and conforming to it. I started thinking about this in terms of ethics when I became familiar with the [Social Thinking](#) curriculum. This curriculum is wildly popular in school districts in the US and abroad. It aims to help students—particularly autistic children—get along by fitting in. As I argue in a [recent article](#), an uncritical emphasis on conforming threatens not only individual expression, but also principled thinking and moral courage. Social Thinking can go too far.



What happened to Jesse Snodgrass ([as described in Rolling Stone Magazine](#)) might be a case in point. An autistic high school student, Jesse encountered an undercover police officer on assignment to investigate drugs at his school. The officer pressured Jesse to buy marijuana for him. Jesse resisted, but eventually conformed. He was then arrested and spent days in a cell before being released. Jesse is lucky to have devoted parents who were able to advocate for him, but the experience was still devastating.

This is not a simple case. Jesse knew that buying pot was illegal, but he was vulnerable in a variety of ways. He clearly had difficulty understanding his situation, asking "Am I getting in any trouble?" even after he had been taken into police custody. Can we really blame Jesse for his illegal actions here?

Consider also the case of [Nelli Latson](#), a Black male autistic with intellectual impairments. Nelli was outside waiting for the public library to open—where would we prefer him to be?—when someone called the police to report a suspicious character.

International Neuroethics Forum

It appears that Nelli failed to understand his situation when he refused to give his name to a police officer who was, after all, a stranger to Nelli. The officer tried to detain him, resulting in a struggle that eventually put Nelli in solitary confinement.

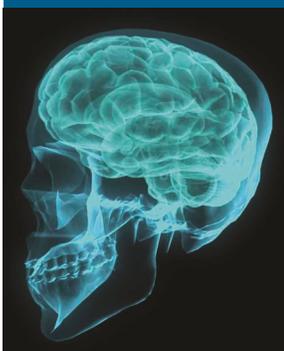
I don't claim to know the details of these cases as they actually happened. My comments can only be offered as responses to the narratives provided by the articles I've linked to here. However, in both of these cases, autism seems to be relevant to whether and how much to blame Jesse and Nelli for their behavior.

The concepts involved are more complex than they may seem on the surface. The behaviors that characterize autism are diverse and vary widely from autist to autist. Furthermore, there are multiple ways of explaining the cognitive processes that give rise to these behaviors. Is theory of mind the key to autism? "Extreme male brain?" Central coherence deficits? And what theory of moral responsibility should we apply? The issues raised apply as much to social transgressions as to legal ones. What attitude should we take toward an autist who hurt my feelings by being honest when neurotypicals would have lied, or who took the last cookie when others would have noticed that someone else really wanted it?

When we step back, the most interesting set of issues may concern the impact of which theories we choose when evaluating whether to assign moral responsibility to autists who transgress social or legal expectations. If different ways of understanding autism and moral responsibility (or different combinations of these) give us different answers to the same cases, academic work on these issues can have a profound social and legal impact on autists. For this reason, I've set as my goal to explore the ethical, legal, and social implications of theories of autism and moral responsibility. I have a further description of the project on my website.

Preliminary work has not been solitary. My wife, Leslie Richman, encouraged me to write about the Social Thinking curriculum and autism generally. Tim Krahn and Andrew Fenton, who have written about these issues, gave generously of their time to discuss autism and moral responsibility. Boston University neuroscience student Raya Bidshahri has worked diligently with me over the last few months, and I'm hoping for many productive conversations this spring in Montreal.

Ken Richman is Professor of Philosophy and Health Care Ethics at MCPHS University (formerly the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences) in Boston. He has written on a variety of topics in philosophy of medicine and bioethics. He is a visiting scholar with the Neuroethics Research Unit at the Institut de Recherches Cliniques de Montréal this spring, where he will be speaking on autism and moral responsibility on 9 June 2016.



Literature | Littérature

BOOKS AND BOOK REVIEWS

[Review of Joseph J. Fins, Rights Come to Mind: Brain Injury, Ethics, and the Struggle for Consciousness.](#) Glannon W. Am J Bioeth. 2016 Jun; 16(6): W6-7.

ARTICLES

[Clinical Research in Vulnerable Populations: Variability and Focus of Institutional Review Boards' Responses.](#)

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[Observations on Ethical Issues in the Neuro-ICU.](#)

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[Uncertainty, conflict and consent: revisiting the futility debate in neurotrauma.](#)

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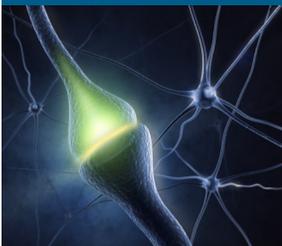
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Literature | Littérature

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[Recruitment strategies and patient selection in clinical trials for Parkinson's disease: Going viral and keeping science and ethics at the highest standards.](#)

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NEWS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

[Ideas from the Trenches - The Open Mind](#)

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[The science of selfhood](#)

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[Bring them back](#)

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[Ten serendipitous findings in psychology](#)

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Resources | Ressources

[University of British Columbia, National Core for Neuroethics](#)

[Neuroethics at the University of Pennsylvania](#)

[International Neuroethics Society](#)

[Neuroethics Research Unit / L'Unité de recherche en neuroéthique](#)

[Journal of Ethics in Mental Health](#)

[Novel Techethics](#)

[Neuroethics at the Stanford Center for Biomedical Ethics](#)

[Berman Institute of Bioethics' Program in Ethics and Brain Sciences](#)

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