

Ethics on Call

Spring/Summer 2007

From the Editor

Bruce A. Arrigo, Ph.D.
Professor
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Dear Newsletter Readers,

In this installment of *Ethics On Call*, a number of themes are examined that raise questions about moral responsibility, choice, identity, and the meaning of our humanity. At its core, ethics wrestles with these very

From the Co-Editor

Lisa M. Rasmussen, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Department of Philosophy



Dear Newsletter Readers,

This year, the *American Journal of Bioethics* began publishing *AJOB Neuroscience*. Another journal on neuroethics is also in the works, so it seemed an opportune time to explore this new field for “*Ethics on Call*.”

Neuroethics concerns itself with many familiar ethical questions: What is disease? What constitutes appropriate treatment? Is enhancement of human functioning permissible? Where is the boundary, if it exists, between treatment of the organ/brain and the organism/self?

In addition to these classical ethical concerns, one of the unique and fascinating features of modern neurology is its capacity to shed light on the entire enterprise of ethics. Neuroethics reflects on this capacity. Consider, for example, the recent discovery of “mirror neurons,” neurons that fire both when an individual is performing an action and when she sees someone else performing it. Is this the seat of empathy or sympathy? What would it mean for moral responsibility to claim that it is? It may also be possible to locate the area of the brain responsible for addictions. Would this, contrary to some of our deep moral intuitions about free will and responsibility, absolve addicts of any responsibility to change their behavior? Freedom may also be at risk when neurology turns its attention to criminal behavior.

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From the Editor Cont.

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issues; in fact, they are its crucible for furthering our understanding of society, of others, and, ultimately, of ourselves.

In the **Case Report** section, author William Van Lear explores the problem of ethics and globalization. He recognizes that transnational and multi-national business enterprises represent considerable opportunities for large-scale growth and prosperity. However, Van Lear questions for whom does this occur? By focusing on the negative side effects and unanticipated outcomes that follow (e.g., greater income disparities/inequalities; economic insecurity; a “world” underclass; increased socio-political unrest), the author forces the reader to contemplate the soundness of these priorities, values, and commitments relative to our collective futures.

In the **Commentary** section of the Newsletter, Elyn Ritterskamp gives us an inside look (a provocative glimpse) at how students rely on their favored ways of thinking and perceiving in order to make sense of those with whom they interact. By turning the analytical lens on one of her classes, she explains several of the processes each of us utilizes when making interpretations (judgments?) about the identity (the past, present, and future) of others based on unstated assumptions and, indeed, concealed stereotypes. The “lessons” to which she directs our attention raise important questions not only

about our human fallibilities (e.g., to incorrectly label others and use these identifications as a basis to then understand them), but about our capacity to transcend the comfortable, mostly taken-for-granted methods by which we relate to and learn about others.

In the Featured Essay, author Jonathan Marks discusses a controversial problem in anthropological genetics. Specifically, he explores the issue of human population genetics. Marks focuses on a current popular practice in which African Americans endeavor to trace their DNA roots to Africa; an activity in which business and commerce increasingly loom quite large. As he explains, the ethical tension at play is one of striking a balance: the interests of science (and scientists) versus the rights of indigenous peoples. How this occurs and at what “costs” are the subject of his essay.

Other items found in this Issue of Ethics On Call are also certainly worth noting. In her **Editorial**, Lisa Rasmussen discusses the emerging field of neuro-ethics and considers its possible applications in the realm of drug abuse and the criminal law. In her piece, **From the Director**, Rosie Tong comments on the BODY WORLDS exhibit now on tour throughout North America and soon to be at Discovery Place in Charlotte this summer. She considers whether plastination (a process that preserves human bodies by removing the skin of corpses while maintaining their flexibility as poseable “models”) is really science education; that is, a form of “edutainment” or whether it blurs and altogether undoes the inviolable relationship between living and dead persons. In his **Response to Critics**, Aaron Maisto remarks on the views expressed by Jayne Tristan and Mark Clemens regarding his original essay on mirror neurons and altruism that appeared in a previous Issue of *Ethics On Call*. In the **Book Review** section, Mary Jo Speer discusses the volume, *My Sister’s Keeper* authored by Jodi Picoult. This is an arresting and evocative work that addresses the depth to which caring and compassion can compromise the

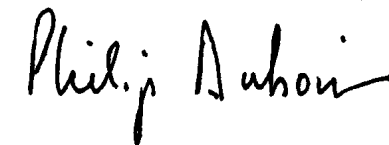
Chancellor’s Statement Cont.

UNC Charlotte provides several resources for members of the campus community who are coping with grief, fear and anxiety:

- UNC Charlotte’s Counseling Center is available to all students to help them deal with issues of fear and grief, among other things. It is based in 158 Atkins (east entrance) and can be reached by phone at 687.2105. Its web address is www.counselingcenter.uncc.edu/ <<http://www.counselingcenter.uncc.edu/>>
- Faculty and staff interested in talking about these events with classes or other student groups may find useful information online at <http://www.counseling.txstate.edu/crisis.htm>. Other useful information can be found at <http://helping.apa.org/articles/article.php?id=22>.
- UNC Charlotte provides an Employee Assistance Program to aid its workforce in dealing with personal challenges, including emotional distress.
- The University maintains emergency response committees dedicated to assessing needs, reviewing resources and recommending changes in an effort for continuous improvement.

Together we can respond effectively to the challenges of public safety on our campus.

Sincerely,



Philip L. Dubois
Chancellor

PLD/cfh

Chancellor's Statement Cont.

of an incident such as the one at Virginia Tech, the University has the capability to broadcast a warning sound and message within minutes of confirming a threat. Simple instructions on responding to the warning siren can be found online at <http://www.publicrelations.uncc.edu/resources/pdfs/Campus%20Warning%20Siren%20Flyer.pdf> <<http://www.publicrelations.uncc.edu/resources/pdfs/Campus%20Warning%20Siren%20Flyer.pdf>>

- In concert with the warning siren, the University can communicate to students, staff and faculty through the following means:
 - o Campus advisories posted on the uncc.edu home page
 - o Broadcast emails
 - o Broadcast voicemail
 - o Weather hotline, which can be adapted for other emergencies
 - o Scrolling warnings and updates on Channel 22, the university television station
 - o Messages provided via intercoms in some classrooms
 - o Messages distributed to media outlets.
- In critical incidents UNC Charlotte has various capabilities for assessing situations and communicating responses.
 - o UNC Charlotte's Police and Public Safety Department provides basic and annual emergency response training as first responders to critical incidents.
 - o Campus Police training also deals with responses to domestic violence situations.
 - o Campus Police and departments such as business continuity, public relations student affairs, business affairs and academic affairs are linked through our campus warning network so that these departments can act in an integrated manner.
- In addition to our Campus Police, UNC Charlotte provides several security measures for students:
 - o Non-sworn rangers who provide escort and other services, 24 hours a day
 - o Trained security officers at residence halls and the library
 - o Resident Assistants and Residence Coordinators trained in conflict resolution
 - o Card-controlled access into most residence halls
 - o More than 200 emergency phones throughout campus.
- In addition to our campus-based security personnel, Campus Police has cultivated a close working relationship with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD). With the recent restructuring of CMPD's University City precinct, our partners there are in a better position than ever to respond to emergencies in and around campus.

From the Editor

autonomy of one's own body as well as one's own intimate self. We conclude this Issue with the next episode of **Chester the Cartoon** series as developed by Bryan Cook.

I invite you to explore the many faces and frontiers of

ethics featured throughout this edition of *Ethics On Call*. What you will discover is how concerns for personal integrity and social well-being find their way into multiple facets of everyday life. In the final analysis, these are the probing questions that tell us something quite profound about who we are, what we do, and who we could become.

From the Co-Editor Cont.

If functional magnetic resonance imaging can be made precise enough to serve as lie detection, is it a technology that should be used, or is it coercive?

Establishing links between biology and moral behavior does not necessarily mean that all human ethical behavior is simply biological reflex. As Antonio Damasio puts it in the inaugural issue of *AJOB Neuroscience*, "ethics is human-made yet grounded in a hodgepodge of neural devices connected with the origin of emotions... all of which play a principal role in the survival of the genes they carry. However, the term *grounded* does not mean *copied from*, and use of the term *grounded* does not suggest that nature provides any ethical mandate

that we should be following." Neuroethics will not provide solutions to perennial issues in ethics, but it will shed revealing new light. It will be intriguing to watch this field grow.

If you are interested in reading more about this area, you might enjoy the following books:

The Echo Makers, by Richard Powers, is a novel exploring how a particular kind of brain injury affects behavior and the sense of self.

Moral Minds: How Nature Designed Our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong, by Marc Hauser, argues for and explains the biological bases of human morality.

From the Director

BODY WORLDS and Human Dignity*

By Rosemarie Tong
Director, Center for Professional and Applied Ethics

An exhibition currently touring North America is generating considerable controversy, and we in Charlotte will have an opportunity to see what the fuss is about when BODY WORLDS comes to Discovery Place this summer.

BODY WORLDS presents human bodies preserved by a process called "plastination", invented by Gunther von Hagens. This process results in bodies that

are flexible and thus posable, but not recognizable as the people they once were because the skin is removed. Usually, the public is told that the purpose of the BODY WORLDS exhibit is science education: to provide non-specialists as well as specialists with anatomy and health lessons heretofore unavailable.

Although von Hagens is his own worst enemy when he describes himself as engaged in "edutainment" or when he performs a public autopsy, as he once did for a \$19 fee (Moore and Brown 2004, 11), I think his work not only challenges unnecessary separations between science, art, and religion, but also poses important questions about the relationship between living persons and



From the Director Cont.

dead “persons.” Moreover, I think von Hagens’s work privileges the human body in a way that it is rarely privileged in a mind-dominated Western culture.

Even opponents of the BODY WORLDS exhibit agree that for many purposes, plastinates are better tools for teaching human anatomy lessons than other currently available tools—books or cadavers, for example. Indeed, when I showed a DVD of BODY WORLDS to my husband, a comparative anatomist and premedical director at Davidson College, he squealed with delight. He said that should adequate course materials using plastinates be developed, he might not need to offer his human dissection course at a local medical school for his premedical students any more. Almost immediately, however, he qualified his statement, noting that a plastinate-only human “dissection” course would deprive students of the opportunity to work on a real corpse, which appears to help develop their “clinical detachment.” However, the appealing appearance of full-body plastinates may be an excellent way to educate the general public about the human body.

One concern critics have raised about the exhibit is the depersonalizing function it seems to serve. The plastination process creates a distance between the body and the viewer that enables the general public to confront dead bodies without getting squeamish or, indeed, feeling any empathy for the departed. However, we are deprived from any personal information that would help us to feel empathy precisely because the donors to BODY WORLDS wanted to be, or at least agreed to be, anonymous. Indeed, criticism directed against BODY WORLDS generally focuses on 1) whether all the donors to the exhibit gave their consent to be plastinated; 2) whether the informed consent forms were adequate, and/or 3) whether von Hagens adequately protects the identity of the plastinates so that no viewer of them has the experience of unexpectedly seeing mom’s or dad’s remains displayed as full-body plastinates. Therefore, the fact that the plastination process prevents person-specific empathetic reactions should be regarded posi-

tively precisely because most of the donors to BODY WORLDS did not want to be viewed in the way cadavers are sometimes viewed: as a decomposing body that still has a recognizable form, what von Hagens terms an “exterior face.” Because the corpse looks like a person we once knew or could have known, the corpse can elicit empathy from us. But as soon as a corpse is transformed into a plastinate and loses its exterior face, it can no longer be recognized. Left with only an “interior face,” the plastinate is no longer capable of stirring feelings of empathy in us. But it can stir in us feelings of awe or wonderment at the unique bodily complexity of each one of us.

I view von Hagens as do Charlene M. Moore and C. Mackenzie Brown, as someone trying to fuse the roles of Goethe’s figures of the prosekter and the proplastiker. Gunther von Hagens is simultaneously the prosekter “driven by scientific curiosity...willing to destroy, even desecrate, the human form to obtain knowledge” and the proplastiker who “demurs at such mutilation of our physical body, wondrous even in death—seeking instead to rejoin what the prosekter has pulled apart, to restore human dignity” (Moore and Brown 2004, 8). Indeed, I find one of von Hagens’s full-body plastinates that I have entitled “The Skin Man” enormously powerful because it speaks to my need to reconcile the prosekter and proplastiker in me. “The Skin Man” comforts me because he expresses my desire to live on somehow, knowing full well that after I die I cannot live on as the mind-body composite that used to exist as Rosie Tong except in the memory of those who care enough to remember me as Rosie Tong.

Some critics worry about people like me, fearing that we do not understand the value of human dignity or, worse, deliberately defy and undermine this value. Although I intend my remains to be buried or cremated subsequent to organ donation and/or use as a cadaver for medical students’ study, I do not think plastination for educational purposes, broadly construed to serve artistic and religious as well as scientific goals, is incompatible with human dignity. Certainly, I think

BOOK REVIEW CONT.

live.

Anna, their third child, is conceived to save Kate. In the beginning, it seems a simple enough solution. A beautiful act really—creating life, enhancing a family. It seems the perfect solution to a devastating sequence of events.

Yet years later Anna reflects on the course her life has taken because of Kate’s illness. Because of Anna’s help, Kate has lived to be 16, but it has cost Anna a great deal. As she says, “I’m an allogenic donor, a perfect sibling match. When Kate needs leukocytes or stem cells or bone marrow to fool her body into thinking it’s healthy, I’m the one who provides them. Nearly every time Kate’s hospitalized, I wind up there, too and now her kidneys are failing and I have an extra. I’ve been having nightmares where I’m cut into so many pieces

that there isn’t enough of me to put back together.”

Anna begins to believe she has value as a person—or ought to—and sets in motion a series of events that will irreparably change her family, leaving no true winner. Anna solicits her brother Jesse, a victim of Kate’s illness in his own way, to help with her plan to save herself. Together they visit a lawyer, whom Anna chose because she read that he once sued God. “It’s not God. Just my parents,” she says. “I want to sue them for the rights to my own body.”

As you are still reeling from the stunning revelations that come forth in the courtroom, you are slammed by the shocking conclusion to this family’s travails. The final scene leaves the reader in disbelief, and with haunting questions. What are the moral, practical and emotional complications of putting one human being in the path of pain or danger for the well being of another? What is the meaning of life and what is it worth?

Chancellor’s Statement

In the wake of the horrific and chilling shooting event that occurred on the Virginia Tech University campus on April 16, 2007, Chancellor Philip L. Dubois issued an official statement. The statement, in part reprinted below, summarizes how the UNC Charlotte campus has developed an “emergency response plan” to confront possible incidents of a similar nature. The staff of Ethics on Call invites you to read how our university community is made safe for its students, faculty, staff, and administrative personnel through its emergency response plan. Moreover, we invite you to comment on the ethical implications of the Virginia Tech shooting, the role of firearms on a university campus, and our collective responsibility to heal amidst the tragic events that took the lives of more than 30 Virginia Tech students and injured nearly 3 dozen more individuals.

Statement from Chancellor Philip L. Dubois following the Virginia Tech incident

UNC Charlotte maintains an Emergency Response Plan which lays out procedures to follow in a variety of emergency scenarios and is tested periodically. We have also developed Emergency Procedures for members of the campus community to follow. Those procedures can be accessed online at <http://www.uncc.edu/bcp/Tools%20and%20References/Emergency%20Response%20Plan/ERP%20Tab%20D.htm>

- Our campus recently installed and successfully tested a warning siren which provides a warning sound and verbal messages to people who are outdoors on campus, in the event of an imminent emergency. Emergencies may include weather related threats, hazardous materials releases, or acts or threats of violence. In the case



RESPONSE TO CRITICS CONT.

limits) of my position. For this, I sincerely thank him. In particular, what Dr. Clemens noted was that my essay suffered from the same ambiguity it was intended to eliminate. Altruism does indeed possess a critically different definition when used by biologists as opposed to mainstream society. Altruism, defined by biologists as a behavior which reduces one's fitness to the benefit of another, is something which most certainly occurs in nature. However, these behaviors must ultimately possess survival value for them to be perpetuated within the gene pool. This makes such behaviors incompatible with the vernacular definition of altruism, defined as charitable actions that benefit others with no expectation of reward.

Dr. Clemens seems to have somehow interpreted my position as advocating the view that biologically hardwired behaviors are not altruistic. I do not believe this to be the case, nor should anyone else. All biological behaviors are, by definition, biologically hardwired. My point concerning social insects such as ants and bees was that they either could not reproduce or were otherwise non-essential to the perpetuation of their genes. I do believe though that a certain amount of "intent" is required for a behavior to be considered altruistic. Otherwise, if a gazelle tripped over a rock,

reducing the effort required for a cheetah to catch and devour it, its behavior could be labeled as altruistic.

In his response to my original essay, Dr. Clemens provided a link to an article, which proposed that behaviors fitting the vernacular definition of altruism could be naturally selected for as a result of group selection. Group selection is not a universally accepted notion among biologists. The preeminent evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins presents a compelling argument against its importance (and existence) in nature within his book, *The Extended Phenotype*, which I recommend to both Dr. Clemens and anyone reading this rejoinder.

I will not say my essay was without flaws; in fact, I was hoping Dr. Tristan's and Dr. Clemens' responses would reveal something of its (systematic) flaws so I could improve upon it before submitting it for a final course grade (Originally, it was a senior exit project). I remain perplexed by Dr. Trisan's analysis; I sincerely thank Dr. Clemens for his thoughtful and well-reasoned rebuttal. I altered my thesis considerably in response to his criticism, and, more importantly, gained a much deeper understanding of the issue I examined.

BOOK REVIEW

The Human Cost of Science: What is It Worth? A Review of *My Sister's Keeper*, by Jodi Picoult

Mary Jo Speer, R.N., is a student in the MA Program in Ethics and Applied Philosophy

To what ends should a Mother go to save her child? Is there any limit to the cost science and medicine ought to extract from humankind? What are the rights and responsibilities siblings have one to another, especially sisters? What is enough and who gets to say? This is

just a sampling of the questions with which the readers of Jodi Picoult's novel *My Sister's Keeper* are forced to grapple.

Picoult creates an amazing cast of characters who enable the reader to live the drama swirling around a family dealing with uncertainty, the unimaginable complexities of science and intense grief: Sara and Brian are parents of Kate and her little brother Jesse. Sara, who was a lawyer before having children, and Brian, a firefighter, learn that Kate has acute promyelocytic leukemia, and a nine-month to three-year prognosis to

From the Director Cont.

plastination for such purposes is more dignified than mummification or cryopreservation for utterly egotistic reasons or plastination for trivial reasons such as wanting one's remains to be "prettified" for display in a surviving relative's home. But I suspect some would disagree with my willingness to give my remains to someone for art's sake as opposed to science's sake.

When von Hagens signs his name to a full-body plastinate, he takes credit for sculpting a work of art that enables living persons to connect to dead persons through awe-full feelings and to ask questions not simply about their health but also about their identity and ultimate destiny. Gunther von Hagens's signature does not destroy, symbolically or actually, the former person who gave his or her bodily remains to him. What can destroy

that former person, however, is everyone forgetting him or her, and von Hagens has no control over this process. As far as I am concerned, von Hagens signing his name to my plastinated remains is of little consequence. Being forgotten by everyone to whom I was related in real life is the real threat to my human dignity.

* This essay is based on "The Virtues of Blurring Boundaries in BODY WORLDS", published in *The American Journal of Bioethics* 7(4), 1-3, 2007.

Reference:

Moore, C. M., and C.M. Brown, 2004. 'Gunther von Hagens and Body Worlds part 1: The anatomist as prosector and proplastiker. *The Anatomical Record* 276B:8-14.

Case Report

Ethics and Globalization

*By William Van Lear, Ph. D.
Professor of Economics, Belmont Abbey College*

The modern era of globalization represents an exciting time of economic change, technological innovation, and nation-state integration. Economic change is represented in the new and more rewarding professional jobs and niche business opportunities connected to globally positioned corporations. Technological innovation has created more interesting and commercially useful devices and an array of entertaining consumer products. The internet is creating opportunities for globally collaborative business ventures. Furthermore, as nations integrate commercially, and cross-border flows of people and ideas increase, the tighter connections and interdependence among nations create the potential for peaceful co-existence.

But as with any great economic change, negative side effects and unanticipated outcomes arise. Globalization

is raising income and wealth inequality within nations, and subjecting millions to increased economic insecurity. Developed countries that open themselves to increased global trade experience enhanced economic instability at the industry level. Globalization is tending to create an ever-growing world lower class by gutting the purchasing power of middle classes who cannot compete with much lower developing country cost structures. Social and political discontent could result. There are genuine limits to how far inequality and insecurity can be pushed before socio-political opposition develops.

In short, globalization greatly enhances new and lucrative opportunities, and the freedom to pursue opportunities. If however some people disproportionately benefit from globalization, if the distribution of gains from globalization is seen as unfair, public support for the current system of rules, opportunities, and policies will wane. The threat is not so much an opposition to world integration as it could be opposition to the reward system.



CASE REPORT CONT.

Unfortunately, people of great importance as leaders and policymakers in affecting globalization are conducting themselves unethically or pursuing substantial economic gain that arises more from positions of special advantage and privilege than creative work effort.

Equity firms use their ownership control rights to make their companies issue more debt to the public, or

to allow access to company savings, in order to receive income flows, ostensibly to pay for advisory and management fees. Firms of all sizes buy each other or blend operations into new firms. Because ownership in most companies is rather concentrated, combining one enterprise after another simply agglomerates productive wealth for the disproportionate benefit of a few. Globalization expedites such activity by providing cross-border opportunities to consolidate capital.

The deregulatory-free market theoretical principle underpinning globalization is echoed in national economic policy via a permissive policy of health care company consolidation. Health care deliverers and private insurers consolidate to gain market power against one another, contributing to rapid price advances in the industry, and directing more income their way. These circumstances thus create reinforcing pressures to shift employer financial responsibilities for benefits to workers or government.

Expected future limits in growth of fossil fuel supplies and foreign policy contentions over oil access contribute to making energy security a priority problem among nations. Crises create huge shifts in money flows toward energy producers and companies are seen profiteering on human hardship and the Iraq war, and use windfalls to pay exorbitant salaries, retirements, and dividends to insiders.

Popular angst is raised when people see businesses treated as tradable commodities merely for short-term capital gain or income extraction. Financiers will

sometimes take public companies private to avoid complying with accounting and financial openness regulations.

American policy is geared to extend influence abroad, and regardless of whatever benefits accrue to foreigners from intervention, domestic costs to Americans are high. Foreign adventures require huge budgetary outlays often dispersed over many years, concentrate benefits to large defense contractors, and redirect policymaker attention away from domestic social programs. The American government exploits the limited economic opportunities of a portion of its population to fill the most difficult and sacrificing jobs in the military. Domestic anti-war/anti-globalization political agitation can grow, along with resentment for sheltered elites and the privileged.

No one issue identified can create much consternation concerning business and globalization, but the fact that all of the issues are pertinent in today's global economy is suggestive for the potential building of opposition to globalization. The combined effect of uneasiness over the distributional system within countries and contention over "excesses" and questionable conduct by leaders could create a backlash against globalization despite its benefits. Why has opposition been so muted to this point? Generally improving stock and employment markets tend to quell criticism of questionable activities when everyone, or at least many, appear to gain; higher net worth for some, more jobs for others. Whether certain business practices, corrupt or disproportionately advantageous, are masked by overall good economic performance or are simply made more palatable to most belie the truth that no system can exist for long when business and political leadership conduct is reprehensible or unfair.

In conclusion, when firms are structurally manipulated, or when a corporation becomes merely an accumulation devise to enhance power, or when the respected business focus of material provisioning for society is undermined, socially negative outcomes are quite possible. Not only can these practices create economic downturns but importantly call into question the ethical basis of the entire economic system.

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RESPONSE TO CRITICS

Aaron Maisto
North Charlotte Mecklenburg High School

A Catholic philosopher named Jacques Maritain once criticized fellow philosopher and mathematician René Descartes for "taking things apart and putting them back together again." In Maritain's opinion, Cartesian analysis degraded things by explaining them. Dr. Jayne Tristan asks why I "reduce so many events, desires, and satisfactions to a set of brain states." My answer is simple: to further human understanding. The purpose of scientific study and inquiry is to explain natural phenomenon, not to find support for popular notions with which we have become comfortable.

Mirror neurons are proving to be a goldmine of understanding for social and behavioral scientists. They are being applied in studies concerning autism, language development, learning, and a variety of other subjects. I decided that they could be used to explain instances of human altruism. Judging from the opinions expressed in her response, Dr. Tristan seems to be fascinated by the mysteries of human altruism. I, too, was fascinated

by the mystery; however I did not let this fascination prevent me from shining much needed light upon it. I mean no offense; however, unlike her, I am not content to remain in the dark when understanding seems but a step away. Much of her argument seems to be focused on attacking a straw man (no criticism was to be found), who apparently believes that the discovery of a neuron which causes people to feel a divine presence would be ample evidence to prove that no "God" exists. This position led me to wonder whether or not Dr. Tristan had fully considered the substance of my reasoning. Regrettably, I am left to ponder whether her personal beliefs were somewhat challenged by the substantial (though flawed) evidence I offered. Moreover, I am left to speculate whether her method of response was designed to create a slippery slope critique which implies that by accepting my thesis the abolition of religion will necessarily (and most assuredly) follow. Neither an indictment of religion nor philosophy per se was the purpose of my scientifically-animated article.

In contrast, Dr. Clemens' observations represent an eloquent and erudite response that explore the merits (and



FEATURED ESSAY CONT.

A lawsuit pending in Arizona has exposed some of these problems. Geneticists collected blood samples from the Havasupai with the understanding that it was to be used to help cure diabetes. It was also used, without their consent, for studies of schizophrenia and microevolutionary history. The Havasupai, however, believe they are autochthonous, and maintain that if they had been told that the blood samples were going to be used to undermine their own ideas about their origins, they would not have agreed to participate.

This comes hard on the heels of the debacle of the Human Genome Diversity Project, which sought federal money in the 1990s for the large-scale collection of DNA samples from indigenous peoples. The HGDP tried to grapple reactively with these issues, for example, developing the idea of “group consent,” whereby both the individual and the larger polity must agree to participate. This raised other problems, however, since the consent of the group’s leaders or elders could well be considered coercive upon the other group members. Further, with exotic DNA as a patentable raw material for biotechnology, the economic relationships and responsibilities were cloudier than ever. In the end, the HGDP was denied the federal funding it sought, principally because it had failed to confront successfully the bioethical issues it was raising on a massive scale, which had nevertheless been flying under the radar for decades.⁵

Interestingly, rather than try to resolve those issues, human population geneticists took a different approach, and simply enlisted private funding instead. The Genographic Project, led by Spencer Wells, is sponsored by *National Geographic*, IBM, and the founders of Gateway computers. It asks us to rely on its good intentions, but in fact did not even bring a bioethicist on board until the project had already been established. Like the HGDP, the Genographic Project has been able to exploit the mainstream science media to promote it. The same questions, however, remain.⁶ Indeed, while the Genographic Project sells itself principally for the reconstruction of microevolutionary history, it is not even clear that population genetics does produce a reli-

able narrative of human history, based on anything more than a naïve faith in the authority of genetic data.⁷

Although they have had success enlisting the participation of indigenous groups outside the US, they have been stymied by widespread Native American resistance to the project. *The New York Times* reported last December that the Project has had to return much of the blood it collected from Alaskan natives, for violating the terms of that collection.⁸ Meanwhile, other private interests with different goals also represent themselves to native peoples, and to the media, as the voice of science. Whether they represent it fairly or favorably, however, remains a question.

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COMMENTARY

Lessons in Stereotyping

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We had a marvelous first day of class not long ago. I want to share it, because I was energized from the experience.

At UNC-Charlotte, I teach a section of a Liberal Studies course called Ethical Issues. The course is designed for students of all fields and grade levels. My emphasis is on respecting the viewpoint of others, while learning how to strengthen our own arguments in conversations about ethics.

We begin the class with an exercise designed to help us see that we stereotype each other. This is not a character flaw, but indeed a fundamental part of human nature. We do in fact make assumptions about other people, based on what they look like, how they speak, and other things over which most of them have very little control. The exercise is that we get into groups of three, and we tell the other people four statements about ourselves, one of which is false. We do not make it a subtle lie because the listeners have little chance of making those distinctions. We avoid numbers, so we cannot say, “I have three siblings,” when the true number is four. Those distinctions are too hard for the other players to work out.

I began by modeling my own four statements. I am tall, so when I stood up to write on the chalkboard, the students easily believed statement #1: I played high school basketball. This is false, but I understand why people assume it. It is part of the game. The other statements are somewhat less plausible, so even though they are true, most everyone chooses one of them. Even though I had asked them to avoid statements with numbers in their own groups, I said I would turn 40 at the end of the semester. They are smart cookies, and most of them did not choose that one! The other true statements for me were that I had appeared on two game shows, and that I had sung the national anthem at a baseball game.

No one chose basketball, even though it is the only one without any truth to it. I told them to consider how other people see them, and to maybe make their lies play on those perceptions.

I arranged them in groups of three, attempting to have some diversity within groups. I had profiled them before I met them, by using a class roster to sort them by major, class year, and gender. I wanted to avoid having all three group members be upperclass architects who already knew each other. In groups, they left the room for 20 minutes and told each other their four statements. When they returned, each group stood in front of the room, and the members introduced each other. Once we heard the four statements, the students weighed in on what they thought were the lies. One of our earliest challenges was from a tall young man with well-defined shoulders and biceps. He said he had only been lifting weights for one year, he had played basketball at UNC-Greensboro, he was born and raised in New Jersey, and he has a new Honda Civic Si. I immediately dismissed the weightlifting as a lie, because I knew men can have very fast results with weights. I had no opinion on where he was from, but I was suspicious that he could fit in a Civic, as I had tried one myself a few years back and it felt too small. It turned out his lie was that he had never played basketball at the other college, and had never visited Greensboro. We made our guesses based purely on his build and demeanor. We did not know him, so we made assumptions. None of the assumptions were harmful in his case, but we were beginning to see how easy it is to be wrong about someone we do not know.

Another student said she was from India, and we did not doubt her at first because she has the look and accent that fit that stereotype for most of us. It turned out she is from Ethiopia, which is very different. I asked if she grew up speaking “British” English, because her accent had made me think she could have learned English in India, and she replied politely that she grew up speaking Ethiopian languages. I was glad to be able to show the class I am as likely as anyone else to make a faulty assumption.



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One of the more interesting lies came from a woman who said she had “married her wife” three years ago. I had seen on her attendance sheet that she was interested in transgender issues, so I abstained from guessing out loud. I guess we could say this lady looked “liberal” enough to have married another woman, or maybe it was her second statement that she was interested in fashion and marketing that made us think she was extra open-minded. It turned out she completely made up the wife story, and is not homosexual. Another student hooted in relief, and I reminded him that in a class of 27 students, around 3 are homosexual. “Nine to eleven per cent, across cultures,” I told him. He was stunned. I said we needed to be free to discuss such subjects without persecution in this class. For this exercise to work, and indeed for the course to work, we must feel safe.

The final pieces in our experience that day were the stories of an African-American woman who is neither young nor old. I thought she had some life experiences of interest, but I had no guesses as to what they might have been. We eliminated her first two statements as true, but her final two were that she could not swim, and that she had spent time in a homeless shelter. We were silent. Finally I said if she really had spent time in a shelter, we felt bad, but if she had not, we might be mad that she would put us through that. It was a very useful awkwardness for us to mull over. Someone ventured that maybe African-Americans do not have so much access to swimming pools, so maybe the lie was that she cannot swim. We were relieved to find out she had never been in a shelter (that was the lie). But it made us ask if she had volunteered in one. We were getting to know each other in meaningful ways.

Most of us have had someone make an assumption about us that could be harmful. My aim in the exercise is to show that although we make these assumptions, we can stop ourselves from making that process cause harm. We can notice what we are doing, and have it be helpful rather than dismissive. We do not want to stick a label on a person and move on. We find that once

we talk with the other person, we learn that he or she is more than the stereotype. Sometimes the other person does have some of the characteristics we assumed, but there is always something else worth digging for. Some of the statements led us to revelations, as they were about pain and joy. The truths can be uncomfortable. The lies can be rooted in unfulfilled wishes. One very young person had been through cancer at age 15. One had no trouble convincing us his father had two wives (he looked like he was from a culture where this is common), though it was untrue. One white man said he had been on the step team in high school, and few of us believed it, but it was true. One young woman had us split on whether she was married, or whether she was a soccer player. We noticed her green shoes, and identified her being married as the lie. Some of the game is detective work, but much of it is watching ourselves label other people.

The following week, a student wrote that he was concerned about his using stereotypes on others. He looks 25, but one of the things we learned about him from the exercise is that he is old enough to have a child in college. He worried he might be acting as a racist, when he realized he was making assumptions about other people. He looked up the definition of racism, and realized we can make guesses about people without presuming we are superior to them. I had done this exercise several times with other groups, and this was the first time we had made this specific connection. It was invigorating. It may be our nature to make assumptions about people, but over time, we can train ourselves to do so with humor and without harm.

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FEATURED ESSAY

Issues in Anthropological Genetics

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A few weeks ago I spoke with a journalist from *Fortune* magazine, who was writing about the popular interest among African-Americans in tracking their DNA roots to Africa, through “AfricanAncestry.com”.

First I explained the disconnect between the scientific data and the genealogy itself. The DNA being compared is mitochondrial DNA or mtDNA. It is inherited from the mother, as opposed to the bulk of DNA, which is inherited biparentally. This unique property of the mtDNA gives us the ability to isolate it and compare it readily. On the other hand, it conflicts strongly with our ideas of “relatedness” – since by this test you are a clone of your mother and unrelated to your father. Worse yet, every generation you go back, the number of your genetic ancestors doubles, but the number of your mtDNA ancestors remains constant. Consequently, if you go back just a few centuries – say, 12 generations – you have 4096 genealogical ancestors, only one of whom is detectable by this test. That person would be your mother’s mother’s mother’s mother, but well over 99% of your ancestors are invisible to this DNA test. In other words, the test is genetic, scientific, and real, but it plays on folk idioms of DNA and heredity to produce genealogical information that is considerably overvalued, relative to what it really says.

Not that there is anything necessarily wrong with DNA entrepreneurs selling it. It’s just that making a dubiously honest buck is as American as apple pie, and this business is based as much on the legacy of P. T. Barnum as it is on the legacy of Watson and Crick.

More interesting to me, however, are the global issues. The journalist explained to me that these companies are matching up African-American DNA samples with those from databases containing the DNA sequences of

several thousand Africans. I asked him how he thought those samples had been acquired. Had the indigenous Africans been compensated for their participation? Had they even actually agreed to participate in the construction of a database whose twin purposes revolve solely around the bank accounts of geneticists and the curiosity/amusement of wealthy American clients?

He had, of course, no idea. The collection of the comparative genetic database had seemed unproblematic. The possibility that it might be a high-tech replication of the exploitative colonial relationships of the 19th century which the world has been struggling to transcend ever since, piqued his interest, but did not actually make it into the final article.¹

That, however, is at the center of a highly contested area in population genetics: the balance between the interests of science (and scientists), versus the rights of indigenous peoples. Archaeologists have been grappling for at least two decades with repatriation—acknowledging that bones, at the very least, are the remains of dead people, whose living relatives are entitled to a large voice in the disposition of their remains. Cultural anthropologists are now studying the even grislier trans-national commerce in human body parts—including organs, tissues, and blood.

Human population geneticists, however, who have been collecting blood from diverse peoples for their own purposes since World War I, have largely failed to come to grips with the evolving relationships between science and indigenous peoples.³ Time was, not too long ago, that you could go to Borneo to collect blood, circumvent native taboos about blood by dispensing penicillin for it, and return home to study it in peace and quiet, and even exchange samples with other laboratories as if they were baseball cards. If you didn’t have enough penicillin, or felt uneasy about holding people’s health hostage for participation in your study, you could explain to them that a blood sample would be used to help cure a dreaded disease, and then use their blood for whatever you really wanted to do with it.⁴