

Overview

Reseña

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Álvarez Díaz, Jorge Alberto. *Neuroethics: relations between mind/brain and moral/ethics.* UAM, Mexico, 2019. 268 pp.

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There is no doubt that Philosophy will always raise issues that have no definitive solution. In this way, one of these is that of the mind-body relationship or, in more precise philosophical terms, between human capacities and their physical vehicles. Are these vehicles the ultimate explanation of human abilities? Jorge Alberto Díaz's book poses this problem in the current panorama of the so-called Neuroethics. The establishment of this discipline (interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary as discussed in the book itself later) has little time: «...it only has three lustrums of construction, if the paradigmatic date is taken into account... the Dana Foundation Neuroethics congress; mapping the field, carried out in 2002» (p. 9).

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When access to people's brains has been improved and considering that ethical decisions undoubtedly have something to do with the human brain, then it may be better to rethink whether the brain determines all free action, including ethical judgments or whether there are aspects of ethics irreducible to it. In other words, if human decision-making processes that are considered free may or may not be reduced to the neurobiological processes of the brain.

The first chapter, «A primate in word land or, what is Neuroethics?» (pp. 3-44), addresses the same word «neuroethics» and makes comparisons with dictionaries, with the history of Medicine and the various claims of philosophers and scientists around it showing the difficulty of using that term.

Chapter 2, «Darwinism in Evolution, Sociobiology and Neuroethics» (pp. 45-100), studies the role that the Darwinian theory of evolution has played as an assumption in the neuroscience's view of ethics. The chapter reviews the various studies by Haidt, Greene, and others, which try to determine brain correlates when people make ethical decisions. One of the tools that has been used is neuroimaging for the study of the way the brain reacts to moral situations such as ethical dilemmas. From these studies, they have derived various positions regarding the data and the scope and methodologies of the indicated investigations. Some argue that they show causal relationships between the brain and behavior, others deny that the presence or correlate is an indicator of causality. Some are neuro-skeptics, others neuro-reductionists. Between these two extremes, the position defended by the author is neuro-critical. This last position does not seek to subsume philosophy to the neurosciences, but recognizes that research should not be ruled out in the formation of a Neuroethics.

In the Chapter 3, «Neuroimaging or Neuro-imaginings?» (pp. 101-143), the scope of the neuroimaging is discussed. Scientific and philosophical arguments regarding the scope that neuroimaging can have are discussed to explain how the brain operates when we carry out actions that we consider to be purely human.

Thus, for example, there are aspects of intrinsic limitations of the technique used in the studies that cast doubt on its scope. The chapter, then discusses the problem of transdiscipline, where an observation that seems worthy of mention for bioethics is pointed out. «Practically all the neurological neologisms that have been developing would seem to be a wonderful example of transdisciplinarity» (p. 125), but due to the neurobiological reductionist it ends up trying to reduce one discipline to another so that interdisciplinarity is reached as much as possible. Probably the same has happened with bioethics when it has tried to stipulate its transdisciplinary character, but it is intended to summarize the clinical discourse or the legal aspect studied in it.

In Chapter 4, «How to deal with the relations between mind/brain and moral/ethics?» (pp. 145-220), the criticisms of Darwinian evolutionism and the evidence of Lamarckian evolutionism are analyzed. As the author points out as an example of the above, «...epigenetics is defined as hereditary changes in gene expression... that does not imply a change in DNA... Two main areas of epigenetics are known (DNA methylation and histone modifications) have profound effects on the control of gene expression» (p. 175).

However, it has been debated whether the evidence really points to the Lamarckian-type inheritance that seems to go against essential positions of Darwinism such as the impossibility of moving from the somatic to the germ line. The previous thing transferred to the subject of the book asks if the neural modifications could be transferred to the descendants (inheritance of the acquired characters).

If this were so, the implications, for example in public health, would be important. As the author points out «...much remains to be studied on epigenetic processes at the neuroepigenetic level. If ethical behavior were in the brain, what are the implications of always doing things well, or always doing them wrong regarding inheritance for future generations...? There are proposals that a combination of Darwin's hypothesis on pangenesis, along with epige-

netic modifications derived from somatic Lamarckian cells and new RNA and DNA mutations, would explain the dominant mechanism of current cognitive evolution» (p. 185).

In Chapter 5, «Positioning and proposal» (pp. 221-264), the author reiterates his neurocritical position. A thesis is presented that determinism is not conclusive and that experiments that have attempted it, such as Libet's that measured the electrical changes involved in free decision processes, lend themselves to various interpretations that are not always compatible with each other.

The book outlines the defenders and detractors of the experiments and their variants. In the end, what has been stated on many occasions in philosophy concludes: those scientific experiments as such, cannot establish the problem of determinism or freedom, since the mere postulation of the deterministic principle is of a philosophical nature.

The book has the great merit of exposing the subject with an extensive bibliography and giving a broad overview of the authors and their various positions. It allows you to position yourself well in the discussion of the topics. On the other hand, when dealing with many authors and topics that are not fully debated, many problems remain open without a definitive resolution. These have to be treated with certain imprecision, such as the role of ethical dilemmas in moral life (pp. 54 and ff.).

The book does not have a definitive conclusion about neuroscientific determinism. It shows, however, that biological reductionism is not an answer that can be unequivocally supported in the discussion of Neuroethics and that the arguments surrounding determinism have not ended.