Chapter 7

Relativity and Cognitive Ethics

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ABSTRACT

Ethics originate from conscious experience. All categories of ethics (meta-ethics, normative ethics, applied ethics, descriptive ethics) are knowable only through conscious experience. Hence, conscious experience might be considered a meta-ethic (the origin and basis of all ethics). Conscious experience appears to us as a unified four-dimensional space-time continuum or field. A neural correlate for conscious experience modeled by Einstein’s special theory of relativity has been found in the human brain. Conscious experience can be described and understood using relativistic physics. The principles of relativistic physics therefore influence ethics. Three universals emerge from relativity which mediate conscious experience and ethics: the laws of physics, the speed of light, and space-time intervals. The presence of these universals suggests that conscious experience (observed physical reality) is determinate (predictable). We do, however, have free will (choice), and this free will appears to be governed by ethics.

INTRODUCTION

Ethics are the moral principles which govern a person’s behavior. They make up a branch of philosophy involved in systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct. Ethics investigates such questions as “What is the best way for people to live?” and “What actions are right or wrong in particular circumstances?” Ethics seeks to resolve questions of human morality by defining concepts such as good and evil, right and wrong, virtue and vice, justice and crime. There are four basic categories of ethics: meta-ethics (ethical philosophy related to universal law, the origin and nature of ethics), normative ethics (contextual behavioral standards), applied ethics (application of ethics to particular situations or issues), and descriptive ethics (empirical neurophysiological research on ethics). The purpose of this chapter is to utilize descriptive ethics to describe how the other three categories of ethics emerge.

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BACKGROUND

Ethics has historically evolved mainly through vigorous debate. There has been little, if any, application of actual physics to the understanding of ethics, as our understanding of physics has not reached an appropriate level. Through the ages, ethics has been profoundly influenced by prevailing scientific, metaphysical, cultural, and religious ideas (Koch, 2016). Many of these were based on assumptions which were clearly articulated, others not so much. Terms such as “consciousness”, “mind”, and “soul” have great relevance for ethics. The meaning and conceptualization of these terms has greatly changed over the centuries, with major consequences for ethics. For instance, it was perfectly ethical in the middle ages to accuse people of witchcraft or heresy and burn them alive, not so much today. Philosophers, theologians, scholars, scientists, and physicians have defined, conceptualized, reified, denied, and redefined these terms in an effort to come to grips with the mystery of our inner life (Koch, 2016) and to come up with an enduring system of ethics. By conceptualizing consciousness in relativistic terms, it is hoped that a major step in the understanding of consciousness and ethics has been taken.

In humans, knowing the world occurs through spatiotemporal experiences and interpretations (Maniadakis & Trahanias, 2011). All knowledge is defined, conceptualized, and understood only through conscious experience. We would not have knowledge of anything, including ethics, if it was not gained through conscious experience. Science is the creation of knowledge. It is dependent on the observer’s subjectivity or conscious experience (Hossenfelder, 2015; Sieb, 2016b). Many of the world’s greatest scientists (Einstein, Newton, etc.) used their conscious experiences (imagination, thought experiments) to generate their greatest discoveries (such as special and general relativity, Newton’s Laws, description of quantum phenomena, etc.). Scientific discovery is also colored by ethics. Research is increasingly accepting the subjectivity (conscious experience) of the individual and the role of values and ethics in every phase of research (from the choice of what to research and why, how to carry out the research, and recognizing that the ethical stance of the researcher influences the nature of the knowledge that is created). Quantum mechanics, for instance, provides evidence that the presence of the observer, and the questions they ask, influence the nature of reality that emerges (Sieb, 2016b). Utilization of animals and uninformed individuals in research is strictly controlled. There is a realization that you cannot separate conscious experience, ethics, and knowledge. Ethics plays a major role in the way the process unfolds, and the course of evolution may well be influenced by the nature of the ethical choices that are made. There are huge possibilities and opportunities for our evolutionary journey that lie (currently latent) within consciousness and ethics. Since the physics behind human conscious experience have never before been understood, it has never before been possible to describe in scientific terms the workings of the mind and the origin of ethics. This is the first paper in which actual laws of physics are utilized to understand conscious experience and ethics. By doing so, it is hoped a better understanding of ourselves, the workings of the mind, reality, and ethics is achieved. This endeavor is based on an ever-increasing amount of empirical research, some of which is described in the following pages.

CONSCIOUSNESS

The reticular activating system originates in the upper brainstem reticular core and projects through the intralaminar thalamic nuclei to the cerebral cortex to mediate arousal, attention, and consciousness, ie. the waking state (Sieb, 2013). The noradrenergic locus coeruleus, the mesencephalic reticular formation,