

**SEVEN VICES
IN NEUROETHICS:**

**The Pseudo-Neuroscience Bias Against
Ethical Realism**

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ABSTRACT

- **Neuroethics is currently dominated by Ethical Anti-Realism (EAR), aka, Ethical Naturalism, which is a paradigm assumption about the nature of “moral facts”, i.e., there are no real, discoverable, knowable, objective moral facts in nature.**
- **Such a basic paradigm-biased interpretation of the facts of neuroscience is bad neuroscience, if not pseudo-neuroscience.**

- **Seven academic vices (deficiencies) that dominate current neuroethics are identified and critically evaluated.**
- **A positive argument for Ethical Realism (ER) is also sketched out; the objective, knowable, human universal moral fact that is both discoverable and known to scientist and non-scientist alike – is oneself as a self-conscious moral agent (SCMA). The outline of the argument is sketched out below.**

OUTLINE OF ARGUMENT

- 1. Neuroscience/Neuroethics that assumes or requires a commitment to Ethical Anti-Realism (EAR), aka, Ethical Naturalism, is deficient for doing neuroscience.**
 - a. It is deficient because this is an *a priori*, theory laden metaphysical paradigm boundary that limits “discoveries” and pre-determines interpretations of all the “facts.”**
 - b. EAR is a metaphysical assumption that is not present in the “facts” of neuroscience.**
 - c. EAR paradigms disallow the discovery of moral facts – ahead of any evidence to the contrary.**
 - d. Neural correlates of consciousness (NCC) discovered in neuroscience do not prove EAR; to the contrary, they correlate two disparate phenomena.**

- e. Ethical Realism (ER) allows for the discovery of non-natural self-conscious minds and non-natural conscious moral experience as directly known, first-person knowledge claims about reality.**

- f. Evidence of other non-natural properties:**
 - i. “True” and “false” are non-natural discoveries of self-conscious minds.**

 - ii. The “unchanging character of the physical laws” of the universe includes the speed of light ($E = mc^2$ is potentially under review as neutrinos may exceed the speed of light), the law of gravity ($G = 6.67 \times 10^{-8}$ dyne-cm² g⁻²), and the “foremost number in quantum mechanics – Planck’s constant” ($h = 6.63 \times 10^{-27}$ erg-s).**

 - iii. If these truths of Physics are untrue, then science that rests upon physics (Geology, Chemistry, and Biology) has little or nothing to offer (Chaisson, Cosmic Evolution).**

iv. There are four points of criticism here:

- (a) Truth (and/or untruth) is essential to science (even if its truth claims are open to critical revision, refinement, and replacement truth claims -- as to the nature of reality);**
- (b) Numbers (c, G, and h) are not known by nor reducible to neurotransmitter activity, to neurons, or to neural networks – yet they are known objective truths of reality, i.e., truth is not reducible to neural events.**
- (c) Alternatively, if Martha Farah’s (Eliminative Physicalism) neuroscience is representative of modern neuroscience, then a self-conscious mind (person) is identified as a fusiform-gyrus-complex illusory projection. It follows then that basic truths of Physics – c, G, and h – must be illusory projections, eliminating not only self-conscious minds but also the laws of science. Alternatively, the Eliminative Physicalism Paradigm**

commitment is the source of pseudo-science, scientism, and pseudo-illusions of self-conscious minds and objective laws of science. ER with real self-conscious minds and the capacity for understanding truths of science allows science to proceed -- where EAR does not.

(d) Lastly, if one just cannot see reality any other way than within the naturalistic paradigm of EAR, then paradigm-blindness is evidenced as the limiting factor, and science is free to discover and embrace ER.

2. Neither science nor neuroscience is value free. There are four arguments used to defend the claim that science is value free (SVF), each of which is critically evaluated:

a. SVF because there are no moral facts. (Problems with proving a negative metaphysical truth claim.)

- b. SVF because there is no knowledge of moral facts. (A dogmatic assertion; a Strawman Fallacy; ER does not claim moral facts are physical properties of physical substances. See 1.f.iv. above and 3 below.)**
 - c. SVF because ethics depends upon religion and science is independent of religion. (This is a modern, anxiety driven paradigm meta-assumption; the “warfare” model of Science & Religion is too culture bound and simplistic; other models are not problematic.)**
 - d. SVF because science demands direct evidence and there is no direct evidence of any moral fact in nature. (An epistemological mistake; see 3 below.)**
- 3. Ethical Realism (ER) is unfashionable in neuroscience but fully compatible with the science in neuroscience and NCC.**
- a. ER has not been disproven, just disregarded.**

- b. ER is at least as valid as EAR (e.g., Shafer-Landau, Moral Realism).**
- c. ER is a Human Universal, e.g., the “moral sense” as a human universal (Darwin).**
- d. ER is a Human Universal per anthropology (Brown, Human Universals).**
- e. ER is directly known by self-conscious minds with the capacity for moral experience and discernment; moral qualia (first-person experience vs. third-person NCC data of others’ brain activities, via arguments from David Chalmers).**
- f. The Blank Slate Theory of an amoral mind is false (adaptation of Pinker, The Blank Slate).**

4. EAR Truth-Telling Corrupts Science

- a. Evidence: EAR produces a standard for truth telling that is defective, i.e., EAR allows**

nihilism, subjectivism, relativism and/or utilitarian truth telling (Farah, Neuroethics). Thus, EAR truth telling in Science would render Science completely unreliable and corruptive.

b. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Research Integrity, requires ER -- objective real truth telling.

5. Doing neuroscience within the restrictions of EAR is “reptilian brain” (hypothalamus/autonomic systems) control of morality.

a. The neocortex becomes a servant to reptilian brain controls (adaption of McLean, The Triune Brain In Evolution).

b. Science, and especially neuroscience, that limits “morality” to EAR theories *de facto* denies the evolution and functional contribution of 4/5th of the human brain. Bad science begets pseudo-morality.

- 6. Fundamental anxieties about the discovery of real moral facts in neuroscience shows that anxiety driven neuroscience is dysfunctional neuroscience, i.e., it is a candidate for a new mental disorder for DSM-V.**
- a. A priori, moral facts are “queer entities or properties” (JL Mackie).**
 - b. A priori, “Science” that just cannot allow free will and real moral facts into reality is anxiety driven Scientism:**
 - i. Free will is a “general delusion” because “we are all slaves of biology.” (Wright, Moral Animal, 348, 350-3).**
 - ii. Moral relativism is now down to a science: right and wrong are “an arbitrary product of our peculiar evolutionary past.”**

c. Fundamental anxieties over real self-conscious moral agents:

- i. Farah (Neuroethics): “Neuroscience is calling our age-old understanding of the human person into question. In place of the folk psychology neuroscience is offering us increasingly detailed physical mechanisms...so neuroscience may be responsible for a kind of second enlightenment in the twenty-first century, naturalizing our understanding of humanity and transforming the way we think about ourselves...”**

7. Physicalism entails Panpsychism: If Physicalism is assumed true (Monistic Realism), and the universal human phenomenon of “inner” awareness of consciousness (and moral experience) is acknowledged, then Physicalism entails Panpsychism because consciousness (even moral consciousness) is entailed as an inner activity, an essential property of matter, e.g., rocks thereby have inner experience of rockness, etc.

- a. Thus, Physicalism does not eliminate ER, it entails ER (adapted from Galen Strawson, “Monistic Realism”).**