

Statement of Research Interests

Thomas Nadelhoffer

My primary research interests lie at the crossroads of the philosophy of mind and moral and legal philosophy. The main goal of my dissertation, for instance, was to analyze and contrast the folk concept of intentional action with the *mens rea* concepts that play a central role in the criminal law. One of the central issues I addressed is the extent to which our intuitions about intentional action, foresight, and responsibility are subject to biases that may undermine their reliability when it comes to legal decision making. Given that this is partly an empirical question, I paid close attention to the relevant data on folk psychology and jury deliberation. Moreover, when I found that the evidence needed to shed light on the issues I was exploring was lacking, I ran controlled and systematic studies to get at the salient data. My goal when doing this kind of experimental work is not to supplant traditional approaches to doing philosophy, but rather to supplement my research by filling in any empirical lacunae that may otherwise impede philosophical progress in the areas that interest me.

In addition to my work on experimental action theory and its relevance to applied ethical issues such as jury biasing, I am also interested in the relationship between neuroscience, free will, and legal responsibility. For instance, some philosophers, psychologists, and jurists believe that there is already a revolution under foot. On this view, as scientists continue to demystify the mind by uncovering the neural mechanisms that undergird human thought and behavior, we will see a fundamental shift in the way people think about agency and responsibility. Unsurprisingly, not everyone agrees with this assessment. On this latter deflationary view, while discoveries in neuroscience reveal illuminating facts about the nature of the human mind, these discoveries will and should leave our traditional views about moral and legal responsibility largely intact.

Two distinct issues arise on this front. The first is purely descriptive—namely, what likely effects will future advances in neuroscience *actually* have on the way people view free will and responsibility? The second issue is normative—namely, what effects *should* these advances have on our views and practices? I am keenly interested in both of these questions. As such, I am not only working on several studies with both philosophers and psychologists that explore people's intuitions concerning the relationship between neuroscience, agency,

and responsibility, but I am also working on a series of papers that explore the relevance of this research to issues in the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of law. For instance, as scientists develop increasingly more powerful neuroscientific tools for predicting violent behavior, how will these predictions influence legal decision makers' judgments about culpability? One especially pressing issue that arises in this context is whether the potential prejudicial value of neuropredictions of violence outweighs whatever probative value they may have. This is a topic I recently explored as the lead author of a paper on neuroprediction that I wrote with Kent Kiehl, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, Michael Gazzaniga, and others. My long-term goal is to broaden the scope of the issues we discuss in this paper and write a book that explores the problem of prediction and the law more generally—a project that will hopefully bridge the gap between the gathering data from the sciences of the mind and recent work in both the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of law.

Finally, I have also recently become increasingly interested in the philosophy of psychiatry. For instance, as a post-doctoral fellow with the MacArthur Law and Neuroscience Project, I have had the unique opportunity to work with some of the leading figures in the field of psychopathy research. It has been an eye-opening experience to see just how much we have learned during the past ten years about the cognitive and affective deficits associated with psychopathy. One topic I am presently working on is whether psychopathy should be considered to be a mental disease rather than merely a personality disorder and if so, what implications this has for the criminal law. I think this is yet another issue that highlights the importance of reaching across disciplinary boundaries in order to address issues in the philosophy of mind as well as applied moral and legal philosophy. Needless to say, I think this is a very exciting time to be doing research at the intersection of philosophy, psychology, and the law. Moving forward, I hope philosophers will have an increasingly important role to play not only in conveying information to the public about advances in the sciences of the mind but also in trying to figure out when these developments should (or should not) make their way into the courtroom.

