

'The genie is out of the bottle': How 'mind reading' will transform medical care

The ability to detect electrical activity in the brain through the scalp, and to control it, will soon transform medicine and change society in profound ways. Patterns of electrical activity in the brain can reveal a person's cognition—normal and abnormal. New methods to stimulate specific brain circuits can treat neurological and mental illnesses and control behavior. In crossing this threshold of great promise, difficult ethical quandaries confront us.

Mind reading

The ability to interrogate and manipulate electrical activity in the human brain promises to do for the brain what biochemistry did for the body. ... Likewise, in experimental research destined to soon enter medical practice, just a few minutes of monitoring electrical activity in your brain using EEG and other methods can reveal not only neurological illness but also mental conditions like ADHD and schizophrenia.

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Against the historical backdrop of ethical lapses and concerns that curtailed brain stimulation research for mental illnesses decades ago, we are reaching a point where it will become unethical to deny people suffering from severe mental or neurological illness treatments by optogenetic or electrical stimulation of their brain, or to withhold diagnosing their conditions objectively by reading their brain's electrical activity. ... But the genie is out of the bottle. We better get to know her.

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