

Studies of caloric vestibular stimulation: implications for the cognitive neurosciences, the clinical neurosciences and neurophilosophy

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Objective: Caloric vestibular stimulation (CVS) has traditionally been used as a tool for neurological diagnosis. More recently, however, it has been applied to a range of phenomena within the cognitive neurosciences. Here, we provide an overview of such studies and review our work using CVS to investigate the neural mechanisms of a visual phenomenon – binocular rivalry. We outline the interhemispheric switch model of rivalry supported by this work and its extension to a metarivalry model of interocular-grouping phenomena. In addition, studies showing a slow rate of binocular rivalry in bipolar disorder are discussed, and the relationship between this finding and the interhemispheric switch model is described. We also review the effects of CVS in various clinical contexts, explain how the technique is performed and discuss methodological issues in its application.

Methods: A review of CVS and related literature was conducted.

Results: Despite CVS being employed with surprising effect in a wide variety of cognitive and clinical contexts, it has been a largely underutilized brain stimulation method for both exploratory and therapeutic purposes. This is particularly so given that it is well tolerated, safe, inexpensive and easy to administer.

Conclusion: CVS can be used to investigate various cognitive phenomena including perceptual rivalry, attention and mood, as well as somatosensory representation, belief, hemispheric laterality and pain. The technique can also be used to investigate clinical conditions related to these phenomena and may indeed have therapeutic utility, especially with respect to postlesional disorders, mania, depression and chronic pain states. Furthermore, we propose that based on existing reports of the phenomenological effects of CVS and the brain regions it is known to activate, the technique could be used to investigate and potentially treat a range of other clinical disorders. Finally, the effects of CVS (and its potential effects) on several phenomena of interest to philosophy suggest that it is also likely to become a useful tool in experimental neurophilosophy.

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Introduction

Caloric vestibular stimulation (CVS) is a routine diagnostic technique in the neurological assessment of vestibular function and brain death (1,2). Irrigating the external ear canal with water was reportedly used in the first century A.D. to purge

foreign material (3); however, it was not until two millennia later that Bárány developed caloric stimulation as a vestibular diagnostic test (4–6). The caloric test requires the instillation of cold or warm water into the external ear canal ('CVS' hereafter refers to cold-water irrigation, unless

otherwise indicated). CVS elicits semicircular canal fluid movement, afferent vestibular nerve signals to vestibular nuclei and activation of *contralateral* cortical and subcortical structures. After 10–20 s of irrigation, the subject shows nystagmic eye movements (through the vestibulo-ocular reflex) and experiences vertigo.

In recent years, CVS has been applied beyond the neurodiagnostic realm in a wide range of contexts with often striking effects. These effects provide insights into the neurobiology of the phenomena in question because the brain regions activated by CVS have been well documented. As with many phenomena targeted by brain-imaging studies, the CVS imaging studies are complex however consistent findings of contralateral hemispheric activation have been shown. These activated regions include anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), temporoparietal cortex and insular cortex [detailed below (7–15)]. Such regions have been linked by brain-imaging, lesion and other studies to the various phenomena affected by CVS. Because these areas are also functionally linked to cognitive and clinical contexts in which CVS has not yet been applied, there is fertile

ground for future experimental work using the technique.

In what follows, we aim to show that CVS is a largely underutilized exploratory tool in the cognitive and clinical neurosciences. This is illustrated by outlining the success of applying CVS in novel contexts across several domains. We then argue that the technique may serve not only as a useful exploratory tool but also as a potential clinical therapeutic intervention for conditions that are (i) known to be affected by CVS and (ii) known to involve brain regions activated by CVS. These conditions span psychiatry, neurology, neuropsychiatry, rehabilitation medicine and pain medicine. Having discussed the utility of CVS as an exploratory tool and potential clinical intervention, we conclude by arguing with reference to such discussion that CVS is also a valuable tool for empirical studies in neurophilosophy.

CVS during binocular rivalry

We applied CVS to the investigation of neural mechanisms of binocular rivalry (BR). BR is a well-studied visual phenomenon in which the presentation of conflicting images, one to each eye, induces an alternating perception of each image, every few seconds. While one image is perceived, the rival image is suppressed from visual consciousness and this to-and-fro alternation continues for as long as the conflicting stimuli remain presented to the eyes. The perceptions during BR are similar to the alternations that occur with the well-known Necker cube, a perspective-reversing ambiguous figure (Fig. 1A) and with Rubin's vase-faces illusion, a figure-ground ambiguous figure (Fig. 1B; see also Fig. 1C to experience BR directly, either by free fusing or using a piece of cardboard to limit presentation of one image to one eye and the other image to the other eye). The neural mechanisms of BR have been the subject of intense controversy for over a hundred years (16). Around the time of our initial experiments (the mid-late 1990s), a shift was occurring in understanding the level at which rivalry is resolved in the brain. The psychophysical evidence by the late 1980s had been weighted in favor of an eye-rivalry model, which held that the perceptual alternations arose as a result of reciprocal inhibition between low-level monocular neurons (17).

In the following decade, however, direct single-unit recordings in alert macaque monkeys reporting their perceptions during BR cast doubt on this monocular channel model [reviewed in Logothetis (18); see also Miller (19), this issue]. Accompanied

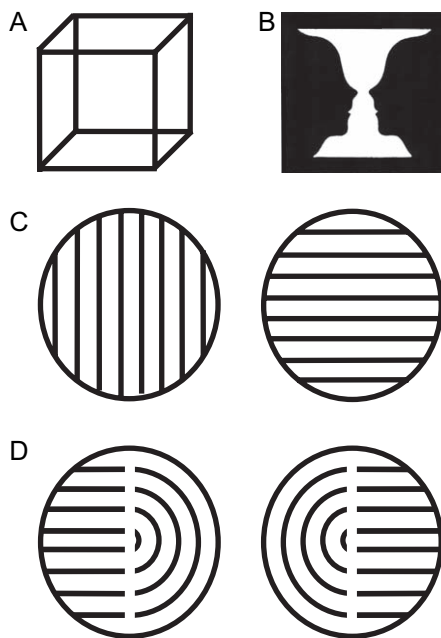


Fig. 1. Types of perceptual rivalry. (A) The Necker cube induces perceptual reversals of depth perspective. (B) Rubin's vase-faces illusion induces perceptual reversals between figure and ground. (C) Conventional BR stimuli induce alternating perception of each image. Try this for yourself by free fusing or using a piece of cardboard to separate each eye's presented image. (D) Díaz-Caneja BR stimuli induce alternations between four percepts: two that reflect each eye's presented image (half-field percepts) and two that are perceptually regrouped into coherent images (coherent percepts).

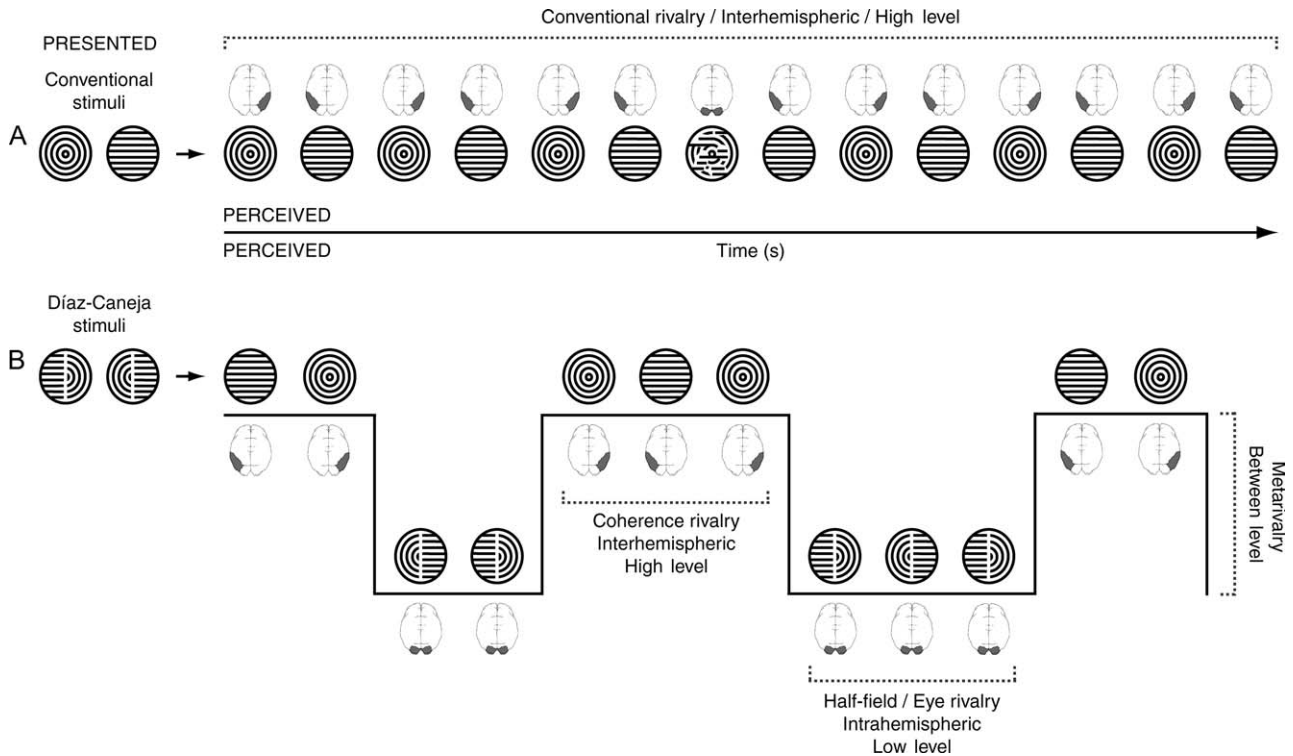


Fig. 2. Models and levels of rivalry with conventional stimuli and DC stimuli. (A) Our previous CVS experiments with conventional stimuli showed that *interhemispheric* switching at a high level of visual processing mediates this type of rivalry (35). (B) In our most recent experiments (21), the finding that CVS significantly changed predominance of coherent percepts during viewing of DC stimuli showed that high-level *interhemispheric* switching also mediates coherence rivalry. However, half-field rivalry predominance with the same stimuli was not significantly affected by CVS, suggesting that the rivaling half-field percepts are mediated by *intrahemispheric* mechanisms at a low level of visual processing (eye rivalry). These findings therefore showed discrete neural mechanisms for coherence rivalry and eye rivalry. In addition, we proposed that these discrete high- and low-level rivalries themselves rival for visual consciousness (metarivalry). Figure and caption adapted from Ngo et al. (21).

by psychophysical studies [e.g. Logothetis et al. (20)], the emerging data supported instead a high-level BR mechanism. Subsequent brain-imaging studies provided conflicting data, with evidence in favor of both low- and high-level interpretations [discussed in Ngo et al. (21)]. These late-20th-century opposing low- vs. high-level views on BR mechanisms reflected similar theoretical positions in early BR research. Thus, Hering argued for a bottom-up explanation while Helmholtz, James and Sherrington argued in favor of attentional top-down interpretations.

Despite the evidence that emerged in the past decade supporting high-level mechanisms of BR, there were few high-level mechanistic models of the phenomenon in the literature. More recently, an amalgam view has been proposed by Blake and Logothetis (22) in which BR is considered to occur through a series of both high- and low-level processes, and this is probably the consensus view today. However, a novel high-level mechanistic model of perceptual rivalry had been proposed earlier (by author S. M. M. and Jack Pettigrew) —

the *interhemispheric switch* (IHS) hypothesis — and it was this model we assessed with CVS. The IHS model suggested that during BR and rivalry with ambiguous figures such as the Necker cube, one hemisphere selects one image/perspective, while the opposite hemisphere selects the rival image/perspective, and the perceptual alternations are mediated by a process of alternating hemispheric activation (i.e. *interhemispheric switching*; Fig. 2A).

Several factors contributed to the generation of the IHS model and these have been detailed elsewhere (21). The model was consistent with evidence for alternating hemispheric activation in humans (23) and non-human species (24,25) on the one hand, and on the other, the conjunction of (i) attentional interpretations of rivalry (see above), (ii) evidence for independent hemispheric attentional processing in humans [e.g. Luck et al. (26)] and (iii) evidence that a single cerebral hemisphere can sustain coherent visual perception (27). CVS was used to assess the IHS model according to the following rationale. The technique has shown effects on attentional function, inducing temporary

amelioration (10–15 min) of attentional neglect following unilateral brain lesions (28,29). Conversely, attentional neglect is known to potentially follow lesions to any of the above-mentioned regions that are activated by CVS (30–32; particularly on the right side: 33,34). Given the effect of CVS on mechanisms of attention and the fact that such effects are exerted through *unilateral* hemispheric activation, it was reasoned that CVS applied during BR should shift the relative time spent perceiving one or the other image (predominance), if indeed BR is mediated by an IHS process.

Prior to the proposal of the IHS model of BR, there would be no expectation that CVS should affect what is perceived during rivalry because all models of the phenomenon had taken for granted that, at any one time, what happened in one hemisphere during rivalry was no different to what happened in the other hemisphere. On such views, specifically activating one hemisphere should not therefore perturb the rivalry process. However, Miller et al. (35) showed in a series of BR experiments using horizontal and vertical gratings, orthogonal oblique gratings and the Necker cube that perceptual predominance during rivalry is indeed significantly affected by CVS. In all three experiments, only left hemisphere activation (induced by right ear CVS) significantly affected rivalry predominance, with stimulation of the opposite hemisphere having no significant effect. This asymmetry was interpreted with respect to known hemispheric asymmetries of BR transitions (36) and of spatial representation (34,37).

The finding that CVS-induced unilateral (left) hemisphere activation reliably affected rivalry predominance supported both the IHS model and the early (involuntary) attention-based BR theories (37). An interpretation of the CVS effect based on residual horizontal nystagmic eye movements was excluded given the similar results found for BR with horizontal/vertical gratings and for BR with orthogonal oblique gratings (35). These CVS findings were also subjected to further assessment by applying a single pulse of transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) to the left temporoparietal region during BR. This induced phase-specific perceptual disruption effects (35) that also could not be explained by standard BR models but were exactly predicted by the IHS model.

Ngo et al. (21) recently proposed additional novel interpretations of BR based on experiments with CVS during viewing of Díaz-Caneja (DC) stimuli (38). These stimuli induce rivalry with four resulting percepts (Fig. 2B; experience this using the stimuli in Fig. 1D): two of these percepts mirror the images presented to the eyes (referred to

as half-field images) and the other two involve the reconstruction of aspects of each eye's presented image into global coherent percepts. Ngo et al. (39) had earlier shown that during rivalry with DC stimuli, coherent percepts are visible for around half the viewing time while half-field, nongrouped percepts account for the remaining half.

The phenomenon of interocular grouping during rivalry [eg, Kovács et al. (40); earlier reviewed in Papatomas et al. (41)] in itself suggests that rivalry involves higher order top-down influences (35); however, Ngo et al. (21) directly assessed whether predominance of both the grouped and nongrouped percepts would be affected by CVS. They found that in fact only the predominance of coherent percepts was susceptible to influence by CVS, while the predominance of half-field percepts was unaffected by the intervention. The findings showed that coherence rivalry and half-field rivalry are mediated by discrete neural mechanisms.

In addition, Ngo et al. (21) suggested that these discrete neural mechanisms included interhemispheric rivalry at a high level (accounting for the grouped percepts, affected by CVS) and *intra*hemispheric rivalry at a low level (accounting for the nongrouped percepts, unaffected by CVS). The fact that both sets of percepts themselves compete for visual consciousness in a given viewing period further suggested that these high- and low-level processes engage in a third type of rivalry – a between-level competitive process (Fig. 2B). Thus, a 'metarivalry' model was proposed to account for perception during viewing of rivalry stimuli that induce interocular grouping. While the neural mechanisms of BR remain to be conclusively determined, our data show that application of the CVS technique in novel contexts (such as visual processing) can have surprising and challenging results. As explained in the next section, the implications of our CVS and BR experiments are not limited to visual neuroscience.

A novel pathophysiological model of bipolar disorder

Pettigrew and Miller (42) presented a novel pathophysiological model of bipolar disorder that was based on three factors: (i) they had discovered that the rate of BR was slower in subjects with bipolar disorder than in controls, (ii) they had conceived of a novel neurophysiological mechanism of BR (the IHS model) and (iii) they merged these two facts with a wide variety of evidence for hemispheric asymmetries of mood and mood disorders. The result was a pathophysiological model (the 'sticky switch' model) that viewed mania as the

endpoint of unopposed (relative) left hemispheric activation and depression as the endpoint of unopposed (relative) right hemispheric activation.

The issue of lateralization in the neurobiology of mood and its disorder is contentious and is not reviewed in detail here. Suffice to say that the mood-related hemispheric asymmetries that influenced Pettigrew and Miller's proposal (42) included evidence from studies of brain imaging [e.g. Bench et al. (43), Martinot et al. (44), Migliorelli et al. (45)], electroencephalography [e.g. Henriques & Davidson (46)], lesion patients (47), hemisphere inactivation (48,49) and TMS (50,51). In the current literature, there exists evidence in favor and evidence against the notion of mood lateralization (52,53). While some studies fail to find mood-related hemispheric asymmetries, there are relatively few reports of mood lateralization in the opposite direction to that entailed in the switch model.

The development of Pettigrew and Miller's model (42) was also influenced by results from a CVS study by Ramachandran [(54); see also Cappa et al. (55)] who reported that following a right hemisphere lesion, anosognosia [denial of disease, e.g. denial of hemiplegia; Bisiach et al. (56), McGlynn & Schacter (57), Jehkonen et al. (58)] can, like unilateral neglect, be temporarily ameliorated by left ear CVS. This led Ramachandran (54) to propose that each cerebral hemisphere has a unique cognitive style – the left goal oriented and tending to deny discrepancies (resulting in anosognosia when a right hemisphere lesion leaves the left unopposed), while the right hemisphere, in contrast, identifies and focuses on discrepancies (the 'devil's advocate'). These complementary cognitive styles and their lateralization are broadly consistent with similar proposals for neural mechanisms of 'affective style' [approach/withdrawal theory: Davidson (59); valence theory: Silberman & Weingartner (60); reviewed in Demaree et al. (61)].

Furthermore, neuropsychiatric corollaries of such cognitive styles (taking them to their extremes) suggest that not just postlesional anosognosia could result from pathological hemispheric activation asymmetries but also postlesional mania and depression [consistent with the literature (62–71)]. As proposed by Pettigrew and Miller (42), these corollaries could also be extended to the general psychiatric setting (i.e. mania and depression in the absence of brain lesions). Indeed, prior to the proposal of their model, evidence already existed for the left lateralization of mania and the right lateralization of depression (as per the studies cited above); however, such evidence had not been synthesized into a coherent mechanistic

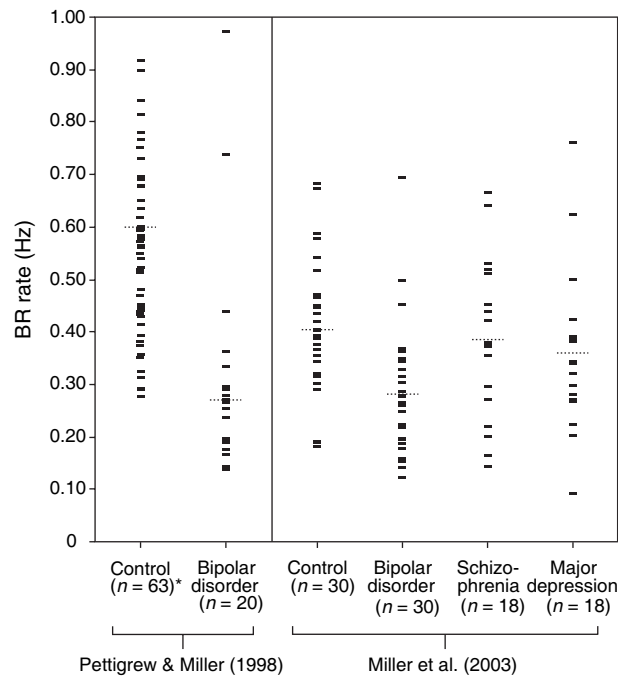


Fig. 3. Rates of BR in normal subjects, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and major depression [adapted from Miller et al. (72)]. See main text for an explanation of the stimuli used in the two studies. Slow BR rate in bipolar disorder was considered to be a trait – rather than a state-dependent finding, also unaffected by medication, but further research is required to verify these contentions. The central tendency for each subject group is indicated by the dotted lines in the respective studies [medians in Pettigrew & Miller (42); means in Miller et al. (72)]. *Four control outliers are not shown: 1.11, 1.11, 1.19 and 1.48 Hz (42).

model of bipolar disorder that accounted for the *alternation* between these hemispheric activation asymmetries.

In proposing this synthesis, Pettigrew and Miller's model (42) was most fundamentally driven by a serendipitous discovery during their CVS experiments with BR. They found that the rate of BR was slower in a subject with bipolar disorder than in subjects without the disorder. They subsequently assessed 20 out-patient bipolar subjects and 63 control subjects and found the two groups to be significantly different in their BR rates (Fig. 3). That study (42) involved the use of high-strength rivalry stimuli consisting of drifting horizontal and vertical gratings of a high spatial frequency. A later study (72) used stationary gratings with a lower spatial frequency to induce BR, in a different group of 30 in-patients and out-patients with bipolar disorder and in 30 control subjects, and showed the same finding (Fig. 3). The separation between the bipolar and control groups, however, was less with these lower strength stimuli. This latter study also assessed rates of BR in a small group of subjects with schizophrenia ($n = 18$)

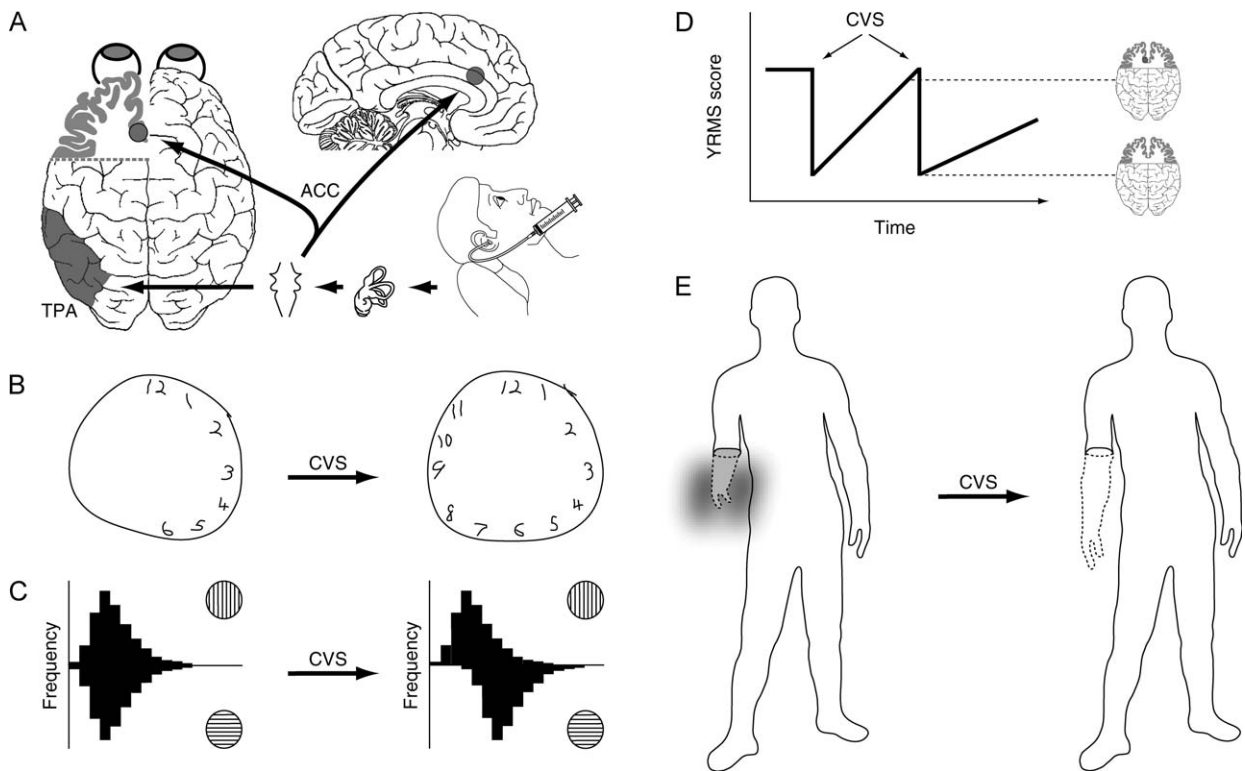


Fig. 4. The CVS procedure and some of its demonstrated effects. (A) Right ear CVS with cold-water activates, through the semicircular canals and vestibular nuclei, brain regions in the contralateral hemisphere such as the ACC and temporoparietal areas (TPA; activation of other areas such as insular cortex and the putamen in the basal ganglia are not indicated). (B) One pencil-and-paper test used to detect (left) unilateral neglect involves the patient being instructed to draw a complete symmetrical clock face. Patients with the disorder fill in numbers on the right side only (as depicted, despite having drawn a whole circle) or may include more digits on the right than the left side. Following CVS of the left ear (ie, activation of the lesioned right hemisphere), subjects' left-sided attentional neglect is temporarily ameliorated for 10–15 min (28,29) as represented by the subsequent drawing of a complete clock face. (C) The schematic BR interval duration frequency histograms represent the time an observer perceives one image (eg, vertical lines) relative to the other (eg, horizontal lines) within a given viewing period. Before CVS, the vertical and horizontal gratings are perceptually dominant for a roughly similar duration. Following CVS, predominance of horizontal image perception increases, reflected in the higher frequency of longer horizontal interval durations [see Miller et al. (35)]. (D) According to Pettigrew and Miller's (42) pathophysiological model of bipolar disorder, left ear CVS (right hemisphere activation) restores toward normal the disordered left-over-right hemispheric activation asymmetry associated with mania (75). This specific prediction was assessed and verified in a case study by Dodson [(76); see main text]. The graph represents the effects of CVS on the patient's YMRs score. (E) In patients experiencing phantom limb following amputation, CVS has been reported to restore abnormal phantoms (eg, telescoped phantoms, as depicted in left figure) to normal phantoms, and painful phantoms to nonpainful phantoms (141).

and unipolar depression ($n = 18$) and found that alternation rate in these groups was not significantly different from that in controls. These findings were consistent with early-20th-century reports of slow ambiguous figure rivalry in bipolar disorder but not in schizophrenia [(73,74); including Necker cube rivalry].

A number of conceptual steps are taken by Pettigrew and Miller (42) in linking slow BR rate in bipolar disorder to the IHS model and the phenomenology of the disorder. The key elements are the following: temporoparietal IHSs mediating BR (of the order of seconds) are genetically coupled to more anterior (prefrontal) IHSs mediating alternations of cognitive style and mood (of the order of minutes). This coupling implies that in

bipolar disorder, slowed temporoparietal IHSs are associated with slowed anterior IHSs. Slower switches are biophysically more easily held in one or the other position (i.e. are considered 'stickier' than faster switches); thus, once 'stuck' in the left or right position (perhaps following environmental triggers with top-down modulation of the sub-cortical switch), the resulting hemispheric activation asymmetry in turn results in extremes of that hemisphere's cognitive style and thus the phenomenology of mania and depression, respectively (of the order of days to weeks).

Furthermore, a clearly stated prediction of the sticky switch model was the potential hemisphere-specific therapeutic utility of CVS in mania and depression. Thus, it was predicted that left ear

CVS, through its activation of the right hemisphere, would restore toward normal the hemispheric imbalance in mania [left over right; eg, Blumberg et al. (75)] and thus reduce manic signs and symptoms. Conversely, CVS of the right ear was predicted to reduce the signs and symptoms of depression. The prediction of a left ear CVS effect on the signs and symptoms of mania has since been assessed, albeit in a single case study, and the results were impressive.

Dodson (76), based on Pettigrew and Miller's (42) proposal (Dodson, personal communication), reported the effects of left ear CVS in an acutely manic female patient with a long history of bipolar disorder. Her elevated mood had heightened gradually over several weeks and her manic episodes had previously been responsive to electroconvulsive therapy (ECT). Following admission, both an increase in dosage of atypical antipsychotics and multiple ECT treatments were ineffective and the patient became intolerant of pharmacotherapy. However, in a therapeutic trial, left ear CVS reduced her Young Mania Rating Scale (YMRS) score almost immediately from 32 to 10, with a lowering of mood and return of appropriate behaviour. The patient, who had previously lacked insight into her elevated mood and inappropriate behaviour, regained insight following CVS and felt embarrassed by her pre-CVS behaviour [in a manner that invites comparison between mania and anosognosia; see also Benke et al. (77), Liebson (78), Migliorelli et al. (79)]. The CVS effect wore off after approximately 24 h but repeated administration 72 h later, again caused a reduction in YMRS score that appeared to be longer lasting.

Clearly, a single case study is not proof of Pettigrew and Miller's model (42), but it is a striking finding and again shows the surprising potential of CVS in novel contexts (summarized in Fig. 4). Replication of such effects in a larger sample of subjects with mania, and demonstration of the corresponding prediction for depression, would be sound evidence in favor of their model. In one recent study, CVS was indeed performed in subjects with depression but only eye movement patterns were studied, without concurrent assessment of mood change (80). Nevertheless, the investigators reported that depression was associated with bilateral reduced vestibular nuclei function, with the right side more affected than the left [a finding consistent with the above asymmetry discussion, given neuroanatomical evidence for crossed vestibular projections; Shiroyama et al. (81), Barmack (82); see also Halmagyi et al. (83)]. The authors further drew

on known connections between vestibular nuclei, suprachiasmatic nuclei (circadian) and raphe nuclei (serotonergic), in linking their results to the phenomenology of depression. While this study did not assess Pettigrew and Miller's (42) CVS prediction for depression, it is nevertheless relevant given the finding of a left–right subcortical asymmetry in this disorder and because the suprachiasmatic nucleus has been shown to exhibit antiphase (left–right) alternations (84). The notion of subcortical bistable (antiphase) oscillators was an important component of Pettigrew and Miller's model [with the genetic anomaly in bipolar disorder postulated to be a reduction in cationic channels that control oscillator switch rate; Pettigrew & Miller (42); see also Pettigrew (85)].

Effects of CVS in other clinical conditions

Further studies of CVS in mania and depression would not only potentially support Pettigrew and Miller's (42) model of bipolar disorder but would also address the intriguing possibility that the technique may be of clinical therapeutic benefit. Furthermore, potential clinical utility may not be limited to mood disorders, as illustrated by the following overview of CVS effects in several other clinical disorders. First though, we discuss CVS neurophysiology in more detail, describe more fully the functions performed by some of the structures activated by CVS and compare CVS (and related techniques) with other novel brain stimulation modalities.

As briefly mentioned earlier, CVS induces activation of a number of contralateral cortical structures. Some of these, including posterior insular and retroinsular cortex, temporoparietal junction, somatosensory area SII, inferior parietal lobule, parietal operculum and superior temporal gyrus, have been considered as representing the human homologue of monkey parietoinsular vestibular cortex (8,9,86–90). In monkeys, this core region forms part of a polymodal system that is responsive to vestibular, visual, somatosensory and optokinetic stimuli (82,91). Brain-imaging studies have shown a functional–anatomical correspondence of this system in humans (92), with some overlap in the cortical areas activated by CVS, galvanic vestibular stimulation (GVS), neck muscle vibration (NMV; through proprioceptors), optokinetic stimulation (OKS) and visually induced apparent self-motion (9,88,92–102). CVS and GVS have also been found to induce bilateral deactivation of primary visual cortex, extrastriate areas (fusiform gyri, middle temporal gyri), and

superior and middle frontal gyri (9,15,93,103). Clinically, it has been shown that (like CVS) NMV, OKS and GVS also have ameliorating effects on postlesional attentional neglect (104–112).

Along with the above activations, CVS has been shown to activate contralateral ACC and the putamen in the basal ganglia [(7–9,15); such activations have been reported less consistently following OKS and GVS, and not at all following NMV: (9,93–99,113–115); see also Bottini et al. (7–9) and Wenzel et al. (15) regarding thalamic activation following CVS]. Located medially, the ACC is considered, based on earlier functional–anatomical evidence, to comprise a rostral–ventral affective division and a dorsal cognitive division (116). The rostral–ventral component has connections to areas such as the orbitofrontal cortex, anterior insula, temporal pole, amygdala and medial dorsal nucleus of the thalamus and contributes mainly to the processing of motivational and affective content. Regions with connections to the dorsal component include premotor and supplementary motor areas, posterior insula, parietal cortex, dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, medial dorsal nucleus of the thalamus and putamen (117–119). This dorsal subdivision of the ACC participates mainly in sensory-related attentional processing, conflict monitoring, error recognition, reward-related responses and motor execution [eg, Weissman et al. (120), Yücel et al. (121), Holroyd et al. (122), Williams et al. (123)]. Recent brain-imaging evidence and reviews also support a third caudal subdivision involved in motor control (124–127) and a key role of the ACC in the functional neuroanatomy of mania and depression (75,128–130).

Novel brain stimulation treatment modalities were recently reviewed by Malhi and Sachdev (131) and include TMS (131,132), deep-brain stimulation [DBS (134–136)] and vagus nerve stimulation [VNS (137,138)]. All of these techniques have reported effects in psychiatric disorders (131) and CVS could also be tentatively added to this list (76). TMS and DBS involve condition-specific targeted application, though with spreading effects. CVS, on the other hand, activates largely the same network each time it is applied (see methodology box). CVS, each time it is applied, activates a polymodal ‘endogenous’ network of interrelated structures that mediate a wide range of sensory and higher order functions (see below). DBS and VNS are invasive, while CVS and TMS are not. Although TMS is noninvasive, CVS is far easier to administer, with the desired activation easily verified by observed nystagmus and subject reports of vertigo. CVS is also inexpensive and well

tolerated (with mild cold-related discomfort to contend with, and the main side-effects being infrequent mild headache and nausea, rarely with vomiting). Given its mild nature, CVS is also a notably less severe (potential) treatment modality than ECT in the psychiatric setting.

Above we have suggested that the effect of CVS in mania (and depression, if the corresponding prediction is confirmed) warrants further investigation regarding whether the technique is able to induce *sustained* therapeutic effects. In support of this notion, NMV has recently been shown to have long-lasting restorative effects in postlesional neglect. This sustained rehabilitation benefit involved at least 2 months of significantly improved measures of attentional function and activities of daily living. That is, NMV plus standard attentional retraining measures produced better attentional outcomes than standard measures alone. This beneficial effect followed a stimulation protocol consisting of daily NMV (5 days/week), repeated for 3 weeks (143). More recently, it was also shown that repeated NMV *alone* can induce sustained rehabilitation benefit (144). Longer term benefits imply that the technique induces neuroplastic changes in at least some of the sites it activates [see Michel (145), Kerkhoff & Rossetti (146)]. It remains to be seen whether such neuroplastic effects also occur following repeated CVS (Dodson’s case study is promising but involved too short a follow-up period). Clearly, further work on the potential clinical utility of CVS and related techniques in the context of neglect rehabilitation (147) and mood disorders is required.

Furthermore, neglect [including attentional, intentional and representational neglect (148–150)] is not the only postlesional disorder temporarily ameliorated by CVS. Other such conditions include hemianesthesia (151,152), anosognosia [as discussed above (54,55,153)], somatoparaphrenias [such as bizarre beliefs that one’s hemiplegic limb belongs to someone else (154,155)] and motor neglect (153). In all these conditions, the potential therapeutic effects of repeated CVS (and related techniques) could be assessed. Another clinical arena that holds intriguing potential for the application of CVS, with respect to investigating mechanisms and therapeutic utility, is chronic pain. TMS has been investigated in the treatment of chronic pain with as yet disappointing results [(156,157); though see Pleger et al. (158)], while DBS appears to be more effective [(134,159); though with far greater invasiveness and expense]. There is preliminary evidence that VNS may also have an effect on pain conditions (160–162) though pain side-effects may be associated with this

technique [e.g. Privitera et al. (163), Rush et al. (164), Shih et al. (165)]. In relation to CVS, its reported temporary effects in the context of chronic pain are just as striking as its above-mentioned postlesional and antimanic effects.

André et al. (141) administered CVS to amputees and reported that 10 of 10 subjects with phantom limb pain had their pain significantly ameliorated, albeit temporarily, following the intervention. In other subjects, deformed phantom limbs were felt as normal phantoms following CVS. The authors concluded that CVS reconstructs the global body schema, restoring normal somatosensory representation. They did not, however, mention potential pain management implications perhaps because the work by Schindler et al. (143) showing sustained therapeutic benefit of NMV (in attentional neglect) was not yet known. In addition, Le Chapelain et al. (166) reported that of four subjects with pain following spinal cord injury, two considered that CVS greatly relieved their pain. In yet other chronic pain contexts, there is recent preliminary case study evidence for the alleviation of pain following CVS in thalamic pain syndrome [notably with relief obtained for at least several weeks duration (167)] and in complex regional pain syndrome [CRPS (168)]. The latter finding is of particular interest given that a motor neglect component has been considered to be associated with CRPS (169,170) and that CVS is known to temporarily ameliorate postlesional motor neglect (153). Pain in CRPS has also been recently found to be alleviated (for up to a week) with yet another technique, prism adaptation (171), which also ameliorates postlesional neglect [for up to 5 weeks: (172); reviewed in Luauté et al. (173), Redding & Wallace (174)].

The mechanism underlying CVS-induced pain reduction in phantom limb pain, spinal cord injury pain and other chronic pain conditions is likely to involve the ACC given its key role in encoding the motivational and affective content of pain states [e.g. Rainville et al. (175)]. Compared to experimentally induced pain in healthy individuals, it has been generally found that in chronic pain states, activity in prefrontal cortical areas is enhanced while activity in a network of structures including the thalamus, somatosensory areas SI and SII, insular cortex, and ACC is diminished (176). In contrast, in healthy individuals, the ACC has been linked both directly and indirectly to the cortical representation of pain. Consistent with its two main functional-anatomical subdivisions, stimulation that induces pain has been found to activate the rostral affective ACC (177,178), while sensory processing of the same stimulation

and pain-related motor responses are associated with activity in the dorsal cognitive division (177,179).

Implicating ACC in the mechanism by which CVS reduces pain also stems from reports that surgical removal of the ACC (or disruption of the cingulum bundle) has been used successfully in cases of severe intractable chronic pain states (180–192). Not surprisingly in the current context, such surgical procedures have also been shown to affect intractable psychiatric illness [including mood disorders and obsessive-compulsive disorder (193–197)]. Right ACC activation presumably also mediates the mania-diminishing effect of left ear CVS because asymmetric activation of left ACC has been observed in the acute manic state (75). Regions such as ACC that are known to be involved in depression and pain conditions (see above) may also hold clues to the comorbidity commonly observed in such disorders (198–200). It will also therefore be worthwhile to assess the therapeutic effects of CVS in comorbid chronic pain and depression.

In none of the studies of CVS effects in chronic pain conditions has the stimulation been administered repeatedly to assess for sustained pain reduction. Controlled trials of CVS as a stand-alone or adjunctive intervention in the management of chronic pain conditions are thus required. This is particularly so given the debilitating nature of these conditions (201,202), the often poor efficacy of current interventions [and limited evidence for them (203,204)] as well as the invasiveness and expense of current interventions. Furthermore, given the reported pain-alleviating effects of CVS across a variety of pain states, the technique's utility may also extend to other debilitating and often refractory conditions such as (i) failed back surgery syndrome [(205); see Rasche et al. (206) regarding ACC activation in this condition and the effects on ACC following spinal cord stimulation] and (ii) postlesional pain, that is, postlesional pain more generally than just thalamic pain syndrome (167), given reports of lesion (207) and brain-imaging (208) evidence associating postlesional pain with another CVS-activated brain region – insular cortex [see also Brooks & Tracey (209)].

In summary, we suggest that investigations of potential therapeutic utility of CVS (and related techniques) in a range of postlesional conditions, in psychiatric and neuropsychiatric mania and depression, and in several chronic pain conditions is warranted based on existing evidence of CVS effects as detailed above. The assessment of CVS-induced clinical effects compared with other novel

brain stimulation methods such as TMS, DBS, VNS and with established treatments such as ECT and pharmacotherapy will also be of great interest given relative factors such as technical requirements, tolerability, side-effects, invasiveness and costs. Indeed, assessment of potential CVS effects in patients for whom highly invasive procedures such as DBS (or spinal neuromodulation techniques) are being considered would seem most urgent. Any findings of positive short-term temporary effects in such patients should then be followed by repeated-stimulation protocols to assess for sustained effects (to thus avoid invasive surgery). Finally, of all the novel brain stimulation methods currently being researched, CVS is the most relevant for application in developing countries. Here treatment options may not exist at all; yet, a syringe and iced water would be readily accessible.

Further clinical contexts for CVS application

There are a range of other clinical phenomena to which CVS could be applied for exploratory neurobiological and clinical purposes. Postulating (and assessing) such novel contexts can be driven by the known functional and dysfunctional roles of brain regions activated by CVS. Thus, for example, cognitive functions and clinical disorders involving the ACC are potential novel targets of CVS studies. Here autism illustrates the point. Considered to involve disordered ACC function (210–214), this pervasive disorder is extremely difficult to treat, entails possible links to vestibular dysfunction [(215,216); cf. Goldberg et al. (217)] and has reported beneficial effects following visuospatial intervention [prism lenses (218)]. Furthermore, autism clearly involves disordered approach/withdrawal behaviour. Similarly, obsessive-compulsive disorder has been considered to involve disordered ACC function (195,197,219–221) and the phenomenology and behaviour in this disorder, in particular with respect to error detection/conflict monitoring, approach/withdrawal functions and cognitive style [e.g. López-Ibor & López-Ibor (222)], suggest its assessment with CVS may be especially illuminating.

A functional role of the ACC has also been shown in motivation (223,224) and decision-making (123,225–227) and it is not surprising, therefore, that impaired motivation and decision-making (197,228–230) are also associated with disorders of the ACC. Excessive motivation [and impaired decision-making; e.g. Minassian et al. (231)] are classical features of the acute manic state

[with implications of a left hyperactive ACC (75)]. Diminished motivation and apathy are classical of depression with studies confirming a role of the ACC in depression [though with less evidence for functional ACC lateralization; see above and Mayberg et al. (232)]. The ACC, the nucleus accumbens, the ventral pallidum and the medial dorsal nucleus of the thalamus are thought to constitute a cortico-striatal-pallidal-thalamic circuit that mediates motivation (233,234). Damage to this circuit can result in disorders of diminished motivation (specifically in the absence of depression), as reviewed by Marin and Wilkosz (233).

Disorders of diminished motivation include akinetic mutism (absence of spontaneous behaviour and speech but with spared visual tracking), abulia (a disorder of ‘will’ – a less severe form of akinetic mutism involving poor initiative, poverty of and slowed behaviour and speech, and decreased emotional responses) and apathy (generalized diminished motivation in otherwise normal individuals). Akinetic mutism can follow bilateral or unilateral ACC lesions, with recovery from the latter usually being better (235,236). One patient who had a left frontal lobe infarction that included the ACC, remarked (following recovery) that her muteness had been characterized by a loss of will to talk with medical staff, having ‘nothing to say’, that her mind was ‘empty’, nothing ‘mattered’ and that she still felt relatively unconcerned after being discharged (237). It is also noteworthy that other investigators have interpreted reports of nonaphasic mutism (including akinetic mutism) following left-sided lesions and nonaphasic hyperlalia following right-sided lesions in the context of the sticky switch model of bipolar disorder (238). CVS would certainly be worth performing in patients with disorders of diminished motivation given a lack of alternative treatment options and the possibility that ACC activation following CVS may assist in restoring motivational functioning toward normal, much like CVS restores toward normal, somatosensory representation in phantom limb, attentional function in neglect, and mood and behaviour in mania. Positive short-term effects in patients with disorders of diminished motivation would then necessitate further study of repeated stimulations to assess for sustained therapeutic effects.

The motor component of disorders of diminished motivation, most extreme in akinetic mutism, can be linked to the motor functions of the ACC (described above) and the output of the motivation-related cortico-striatal-pallidal-thalamic circuit to motor cortex, basal ganglia and the reticulospinal tract (233). Recall that CVS induces basal ganglia

activation (putamen) along with ACC activation, raising the issue of potential CVS effects on not just the disorders already discussed (including disorders of diminished motivation) but also on movement disorders more generally. One such example is the group of dystonias, thought to be primarily basal ganglia disorders (239,240), that interestingly are comorbid with CRPS (241,242), treatable with DBS (243,244) and shown in case studies (of cervical dystonia) to be ameliorated with GVS (245), acoustic vestibular stimulation (245) and NMV [(246,247); see also Münchau & Bronstein (248), Bove et al. (249,250)].

Furthermore, catatonia is thought to be primarily a motor disorder (251) that occurs in association with depression, mania and schizophrenia (along with metabolic disorders, neurological disorders and drug-induced/toxic states). It involves a range of symptoms and signs including mutism, stupor, posturing, automatic obedience, mannerisms and a variety of abnormal movement patterns and behaviours. Catatonia has also been proposed to involve right orbitofrontal cortex hypoactivation that leads to ACC and basal ganglia activity changes (252). Consideration should therefore be given to CVS as a potential intervention for catatonia (notwithstanding difficult issues of consent). This suggestion is also of relevance for the present discussion given recent interest in links between catatonia and autism [e.g. Dhossche et al. (253)].

Thus, we propose, admittedly in a speculative manner, that CVS (and related techniques) could be applied to clinical contexts in which the underlying neurobiology (and phenomenology) is suggestive of potential modulation. This includes clinical conditions such as autism, obsessive-compulsive disorder, disorders of diminished motivation, dystonia and catatonia. There are many issues associated with our suggestion that CVS be considered as an intervention in such conditions, and indeed in the conditions discussed earlier including attentional neglect, mood disorders and chronic pain states (see methodology box). We certainly do not expect, nor wish to propose, that CVS is likely to be a brain stimulation panacea. On the contrary, we wish to emphasize that there currently exist no clinical trials showing therapeutic efficacy of CVS. However, there do exist studies reporting dramatic modulation by CVS (reversing neglect, mania and several chronic pain states), along with evidence for sustained benefit (neuroplastic effects) using a closely related technique (NMV). Such evidence, together with the fact that most of the conditions we have listed can be refractory to current treatments or are often treated

only with invasive and expensive interventions (or not treated at all in developing countries) suggests that our proposal for widespread assessment of CVS in clinical contexts is not unwarranted.

CVS studies and neurophilosophy

In addition to potential clinical utility as discussed above, reported CVS effects on vision, attention, anosognosia, somatoparaphrenias, mood, somatosensory representation and pain suggest that the neural mechanisms of these phenomena are amenable to investigation with this novel brain stimulation technique. Cognitive neuroscience studies involving phenomena such as decision-making and motivation in normal subjects can also be performed using CVS. Moreover, laterality research has generally not taken advantage of CVS as a means to selectively activate one or the other cerebral hemisphere [Bächtold et al. (254) being a notable exception]. As should by now be clear, the type and range of phenomena modulated by CVS also suggests that the technique has potentially important implications for experimental neurophilosophy.

Broadly defined, neurophilosophy [a term introduced by Churchland (255)] entails two approaches – empirical neuroscience studies of cognitive (mental) phenomena of specific interest to philosophy, on the one hand, and philosophic analyses of the phenomena and their study in the context of neuroscientific advances, on the other. In the remaining discussion, we consider the first of these approaches, in particular with respect to existing and future studies of CVS. We do not propose specific neurophilosophic hypotheses or experiments. Rather, we wish to point out that CVS, given its effects on many phenomena of interest to philosophy (often experimentally elusive phenomena), and given its safe, inexpensive and non-invasive nature, ought to be an extremely useful tool for doing neurophilosophy.

In the case of CVS studies of BR, the neurophilosophic target of interest is consciousness, specifically visual consciousness. The broad implications of BR research for the scientific study of consciousness are addressed in detail elsewhere [Miller (19), this issue; an example of the second type of neurophilosophic approach; see also Miller (37)], and specific issues raised by the IHS model are also discussed in that paper [see Footnote 8 in Miller (19)]. Another target for neurophilosophy that can be addressed using CVS is belief. Recall that CVS induces short-term reversals of lesion-related anosognosia (denial of disease). Thus, the patient prior to CVS is unaware of their paralysis

or, even if made 'aware' of the deficit, believes there is no reason to be concerned by it. Following CVS, the patient is temporarily able to acknowledge their hemiparesis and further that their paralysis is indeed cause for concern. Belief is a prominent issue in the philosophy of mind and is an elusive phenomenon to study empirically, certainly with respect to directly modulating it by brain stimulation. Thus, CVS investigations of mechanisms of belief, its dysfunction and repair, are a potentially fruitful empirical approach for neurophilosophy.

Progressing from a cognitive neuroscience study of anosognosia (e.g. assessing brain-imaging activations associated with pre-CVS anosognosia and post-CVS return of insight) to a more specifically neurophilosophic study of belief is best served by the development of particular neurophilosophic questions. Thus, the types of questions asked by a neurophilosophic study ought to be different to those asked by standard cognitive neuroscience studies. Distinctive neurophilosophic questions on belief, for example, should emerge from problems in philosophy posed by notions and theories of belief. Not all such problems will require empirical investigation (many rather, being problems of logic) but some will indeed be amenable to direct empirical enquiry. A simple brain stimulation technique that has demonstrable effects on an individual's beliefs must therefore be regarded as a useful neurophilosophic tool, notwithstanding interpretation issues associated with brain stimulation methods [see Miller (19), this issue] and inference from pathological to normal mechanisms.

To avoid being limited to pathology-based neurophilosophic experiments, CVS could also be applied in normal subjects, ideally assessing neurophilosophic phenomena with known laterality components, or assessing neurophilosophic phenomena *for* laterality components. Thus, we wonder whether subtle belief-based experiments [e.g. Bechara et al. (256)] in normal subjects may detect CVS-induced modulation of cognitive style. In this regard, it is noteworthy that hemisphere-specific CVS modulations of lateralized verbal and spatial performance measures in normal subjects have been reported (254). In addition, it has been recently shown in healthy volunteers that TMS-induced disruption of right but not left dorsolateral prefrontal cortex led to significantly greater risk taking in a gambling (decision-making) task (257).

Returning to the pathological domain, bizarre distortions of belief such as those seen in postlesional somatoparaphrenia ('My paralyzed arm and leg are not *mine* doctor, they are *yours* aren't they?' or 'Oh, that arm and leg were put there by

the cleaner last night!') also suggest further CVS investigations, in this case entailing beliefs about self and other. Similarly, autism, as many investigators have considered (258–260), entails notions of self and other (theory of mind). Thus, beneficial CVS effects showed in these conditions would also be of neurophilosophic interest. In addition, it is particularly worth noting that recent brain stimulation experiments have directly implicated the temporoparietal junction as a key region in the polymodal processing of embodiment or localization of self. TMS of this cortical area in the right hemisphere in healthy volunteers was found to disrupt processing of mental imagery changes of body position and visual perspective (261). In keeping with this finding, it has also been shown in healthy subjects that CVS-induced activation of the left hemisphere impaired performance on a task that engaged high-resolution mental imagery (262).

Furthermore, it was recently found that the discharge of a seizure focus (in an epilepsy patient), which partially overlapped with the temporoparietal junction, caused an 'out-of-body' experience (disembodiment). Conversely, when the patient engaged in voluntary, imaginal own-body movements (which also occurred spontaneously during her out-of-body experiences), activation was observed in the temporoparietal junction (261). Remarkably in a separate study on the same patient, electrical stimulation of this region was found to reliably induce the illusory perception of a person shadowing the patient's bodily movements (263). It has also recently been argued that GVS could be used to investigate the neural mechanisms of self-processing and embodiment in neurologically intact subjects [see Lenggenhager et al. (264)]. In relation to CVS, consistent activation of the temporoparietal junction shown in brain-imaging studies (see above), along with its effects on restoring somatosensory representation in phantom limb, suggests that this technique is also likely to be useful in neurophilosophic studies of self and embodiment.

Still other potential neurophilosophic applications of CVS can be considered, including, for example, CVS studies of psychosis (in addition to manic psychosis). Thus, given the linking of anosognosia to the lack of insight commonly seen in schizophrenia (265–267), CVS studies in this condition may prove of interest with respect to understanding belief and insight, and their distortion and loss respectively (perhaps also with therapeutic potential). Similarly, the experience of pain is well-trodden territory within the philosophical and neurophilosophic literature and its

alleviation by CVS may shed light on the experience of pain and attitudes toward pain [see Price et al. (268)]. Furthermore, the neurophilosophic relevance of CVS investigations of phenomena such as mania, depression, disorders of diminished motivation, movement disorders and decision-making may have relevance to neurophilosophic targets as elusive as volition and free will [see eg, Tibbetts (269), Burns & Bechara (270), Gomes (271), Tancredi (272)].

Finally, rather than suggest that CVS will be of important utility in doing experimental neurophilosophy, it could be argued that, on the contrary, the wide range of conditions and phenomena the technique modulates actually diminishes its exploratory utility. Thus, it could be asked how the effects of CVS on one neurophilosophic phenomenon can be distinguished from its effects on another? One solution to this quandary is to combine CVS with other more focal brain stimulation methods or with imaging or electrophysiology protocols, to attempt to tease apart distinct functional–anatomical contributions to the various phenomena. Another is to argue that the reality for cognitive neuroscience is quite the converse and that functional–anatomical overlap for distinct phenomena, far from hindering progress, in fact illuminates understanding at the systems level. While it is not yet clear just how far CVS will reach into the neurophilosophical domain, the existing reports of its effects on visual consciousness, attention, mood, pain, somatosensory representation, phantom sensations and belief make its reach already impressive.

Conclusions

We have provided an overview of the effects of CVS in a wide range of contexts in the cognitive and clinical neurosciences. The application of the technique in the visual neuroscience arena in assessing novel models of BR was detailed, as was the link between BR, CVS and bipolar disorder. It was further argued that the reported effects of CVS, and its capacity to activate structures such as temporoparietal cortex, insular cortex and especially ACC, makes its future application in the cognitive and clinical neurosciences (including studies of potential therapeutic utility) an exciting prospect. This is particularly so given its safe, inexpensive and noninvasive nature as well as its ease of administration. We have also suggested that CVS represents a unique experimental method for neurophilosophic studies, through its dramatic modulation of phenomena of great interest to philosophy and by virtue of its activation of brain structures implicated in such phenomena. A century ago, Bárány (4) proposed the use of CVS as a neurological diagnostic test. One hundred years later, the potential of CVS as an exploratory and clinical tool appears to only now be dawning on the neurosciences.

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CVS administration: In our use of the CVS technique, subjects are screened by a medical practitioner to determine suitability for participation. Exclusion criteria we have used (which will obviously vary depending on the study, in particular the clinical group under investigation) include (i) a diagnosis or family history of an axis I psychiatric disorder; (ii) epilepsy or any brain disorder such as a brain injury, tumor or other significant neurological disease; (iii) significant cardiac or respiratory disease; (iv) ear disease such as a perforated ear drum or otitis media/externa; (v) vestibular disease or significant motion sickness and (vi) pregnancy. Written informed consent is obtained. Subjects are otoscopically examined by the medical practitioner for any signs of significant ear disease. The subject lies on a couch maintaining a vertical midsagittal plane, with head orientation kept at 30° from the horizontal plane. Iced water is irrigated into the external auditory canal using a 50-ml plastic syringe with a short piece of soft silastic tubing attached (the silastic tubing is readily available from intravenous cannulas, with the needle end removed). The end of the tubing is positioned near but not touching the tympanic membrane. Irrigation continues until there are demonstrable signs of nystagmus and reports of vertigo. The reflux water is collected in a kidney dish placed on the subject's shoulder. In the authors' experience of administering CVS to several hundred subjects, only three subjects requested that CVS be ceased (as a result of cold-related discomfort). Many find the experience of vertigo interesting. A mild headache may follow CVS (easily relieved with simple analgesics), as may mild nausea. Rarely vomiting may occur (in only two of our test subjects out of several hundred). Sham stimulation can be administered by irrigating the ear canal with water at body temperature (which does not induce vestibular stimulation); however, the lack of vertigo may suggest to the subject that actual stimulation has not occurred.

Methodological and application issues: In planning a CVS study, particularly in relation to clinical conditions, several issues need to be considered. Informed consent is one such issue, especially in relation to conditions in which this may be compromised. Also, which technique is most appropriate? Thus, for example, CVS might be best applied to mania and autism compared with NMV because the latter requires active participation from the subject (in determining the subjective midline for purposes of placement of the vibrator tip). Of course, subjects with mania or autism may not tolerate cold-water irrigation (though we note that CVS was well tolerated by Dodson's case study subject). In such cases, OKS may be considered though the wearing of a virtual reality headset to induce this or sitting within a rotating striped drum may also not be tolerated. Perhaps all of the related techniques could be available to the clinician and patient, thus enabling a second option if the first is not tolerated. It is not clear, however, whether all the related techniques would work with equal efficacy. In particular, NMV has not been reported to induce ACC activation and such a factor may be relevant in the choice of technique depending on the neurobiology of the clinical condition under investigation. Also, patient selection will be important. Thus, for example, if autism is being studied, it will practically be preferable to begin investigations with higher functioning subjects (noting, however, that such subjects may be more *or* less likely than lower functioning subjects, to benefit from CVS).

It should also be noted that whether CVS produces contralateral neural activation or disruption/inhibition is not in itself clear from the brain-imaging studies; however, activation would appear most likely when considering the CVS literature as a whole (i.e. in relation to modulation of lateralized phenomena, CVS-induced activation rather than inhibition, is far more consistent). Furthermore, it could be argued that the effects of CVS are the result of general arousal or a 'shock to the system' from the cold-water irrigation. However, this explanation is refuted by exact opposite effects on attentional neglect when cold water is administered contralesionally (restoration) and ipsilesionally [worsening (139,140)] and, moreover, by the finding of no effect on neglect when cold water is irrigated in both ears simultaneously (140). Indeed, the issue of left ear vs. right ear stimulation needs to be considered carefully in planning CVS studies. The selection may be obvious from the underlying neurobiology of the disorder being investigated (e.g. left ear for mania treatment, right ear for depression treatment); however, for many of the disorders we have listed, it is not clear which ear/hemisphere should be stimulated. This will be especially so for disorders without a known laterality component but even the presence of laterality factors may not always be instructive. Thus, one might expect the contralaterality of phantom limb perception to suggest ipsilateral ear irrigation (i.e. CVS of the ear ipsilateral to the phantom). However, the reports of pain alleviation and phantom limb normalization suggest that irrigation of either ear can be effective [though with less data available for contralesional ear CVS (141)]. It may therefore be prudent in repeated-stimulation studies to irrigate the ear (hemisphere) which holds the least likelihood of worsening comorbid depression should this exist in the case of chronic pain states, for example. Thus, as a general rule, unless laterality considerations suggest otherwise, it is probably best for studies of repeated CVS to start with irrigation of the right ear (thus avoiding the theoretical risk of depression as a side-effect). Indeed for CVS studies of mood disorders, the possibility of rebound mania or depression needs to be taken into account and monitored during follow-up periods. Any such side-effects, along with other adverse events in repeated-CVS studies, should be reported in the literature in the manner that occurs currently for other novel brain stimulation techniques.

Other unanswered questions with respect to CVS include (i) whether water at 30°C would induce stimulation as clinically effective as iced water; (ii) whether warm water will induce stimulation as effective as cold water [warm water induces ipsilateral rather than contralateral hemispheric activation and so would be administered to the ear opposite to that used with cold water; see Dieterich et al. (142)]; (iii) how often the stimulation is required to be repeated and whether different repeated-stimulation protocols will induce substantially different clinical efficacy; (iv) whether a 3-week repeated-stimulation protocol as used with NMV (143), for example, would need to be repeated some months/years later (as occurs with ketamine infusions or radiofrequency denervation for some chronic pain states, for example); (v) whether the duration of CVS administration affects efficacy (i.e. what the effect would be of continuing irrigation for several minutes beyond the onset of nystagmus and vertigo, rather than ceasing irrigation at this point); (vi) whether combined cold-water CVS in one ear and warm-water CVS in the other will produce stronger effects than either alone; (vii) when in the course of a disorder the clinical efficacy of CVS would be most potent; (viii) when following the CVS protocol is the optimal time to collect outcome data; (ix) whether short-term (temporary) modulations will always be an indicator of likely therapeutic benefit (i.e. whether a condition may nevertheless improve following repeated CVS, despite there having been no observable, temporary phenomenological or behavioural improvements following a single CVS session); (x) whether CVS and related techniques are best administered alone or as adjunctive therapies and (xi) the effect of handedness with respect to laterality and CVS efficacy [see Bense et al. (10), Dieterich et al. (142)]. Many more questions no doubt remain to be raised and answered.

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