

BIOE XXX

Neuroethics

Fall 2012

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“Perhaps a man really dies when his brain stops, when he loses the power to take in a new idea.”

— George Orwell

Neuroethics might well be the most rapidly growing area within bioethics; indeed, in some respects neuroethics has grown as an independent field, with its own journals, professional society and institutional centers. This growth over the past decade is partly attributable to the growth of neuroscience itself and to the challenging philosophical and moral questions it inherently raises.

A 2012 Royal Society report, observes that “(a)n increasingly mechanistic understanding of the brain raises a host of ethical, legal, and social implications. This has laid the foundation for the emergent field of Neuroethics, which examines ethical issues governing the conceptual and practical developments of neuroscience. Irrespective of their validity, even the claims that modern neuroscience entails the re-examination of complex and sensitive topics like free will, consciousness, identity, and responsibility raises significant ethical issues. As such, neuroethics asks questions that extend beyond the usual umbrella of biomedical ethics.”

Our course will, therefore, consider the new knowledge and ways of learning about the brain from scientific and ethico-legal and social standpoints. We will examine the core themes of neuroethics, including cognitive enhancement, the nature of the self and personhood, neuroimaging and privacy, and the ways that all these themes are brought together in matters affecting national security.

Grading

Grades will be based on class participation (20%), a mid-term (20%), and a comprehensive final examination.

Required Reading

All required reading will be drawn from these two books, which are available at the Penn Bookstore on 34th and Sansom.

M. Farah, *Neuroethics: An Introduction with Readings* (MIT Press, 2010).

J. Moreno, *Mind Wars: Brain Research and the Military in the 21st Century* (Bellevue, 2012).

Supplementary Readings on Blackboard

Some supplementary class readings will be available online or on Blackboard. Please check as soon as possible that you have access to Blackboard. Once you have access you should check the site regularly as announcements and/or links to interesting Websites, news stories, etc., may be posted. Please note that we may add supplementary readings to the syllabus as the semester and current events unfold. So please look at Blackboard each week. Supplementary readings, even if not required, will enrich your experience of the course.

Schedule (“MF” denotes a class in which Dr. Farah will give a lecture)

1. Sept 11 – Introduction, *Neuroethics*, “An Overview”
2. Sept 18 -- Better Brains I (MF*)—*Neuroethics* 2.1, 2.2
3. Sept 25 -- Better Brains II—*Neuroethics* 2.3, 2.4, 2.5
4. Oct 2 -- Brain, Self, and Authenticity—*Neuroethics* 3.2, 3.3, 3.4
5. Oct 9 -- Brain Reading I (MF)—*Neuroethics* 4.1, 4.2
6. Oct 16 -- Brain Reading II—*Neuroethics* 4.3, 4.4

Mid-Term Exam (in class)

Fall Break

7. Oct 30 -- Neuroscience and Justice—*Neuroethics* 5.2, 5.3, 5.4
8. Nov 6 -- Brains and Persons I (MF)—*Neuroethics* 6.2, 6.3
9. Nov 13 -- Brains and Persons II—*Neuroethics* 6.4, 6.5

10. Nov 20 -- Mind Wars I (MF)—*Mind Wars* 2, 3

11. Nov 27 -- Mind Wars II—*Mind Wars* 6,7

12. Dec 4 – Guest Speaker--Michael Chorost

Dec 18 – *Final Examination*