| Medical |
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| In putting your view across you should consider what is the limit of healthcare? and how does the BCI being presented to you offer a future healthcare treatment option?  There are three areas that can be considered in addressing the above: Professional domain: Where is the line between treatment and enhancement? and what is a treatment? Over time the healthcare offered to populations changes due to many factors such as improved diagnostics, treatment options along with social and cultural issues. Healthcare professions have always adapted to these changes to meet the needs of the institutions and communities they serve. One way to bring about a change in the healthcare being offered is to ‘medicalize’ issues so that they come to be seen as needing treatment (Conrad 2007).  Therefore, if patients deem a BCI to be in an area they perceive needs treatment (E.g. improved memory) should it be medicalised and the treatment/enhancement offered? Normal functioning Being healthy means different things to different people but a broad definition is that you are able to do all the things that other members of your species can do. Many think that health care should primarily be aimed at getting people back to “normal”, however some individuals disagree with this view arguing that it doesn’t take account of the diversity of our species or the lives that people lead. Even when there is no treatment to achieve“species typical” functioning, there may be compensatory technologies that go beyond the range of functioning (Silvers 1998), an example being powered wheelchairs that do not suffer from fatigue and can therefore cover increased distances compared to being on foot.  Where does treatment stop and enhancement start? Should limits be placed on the BCI to ensure it doesn’t go beyond ‘normal’ functioning? Disease-Based Accounts Treatments are interventions that address the health problems created by diagnosable diseases and disabilities. Enhancements, on the other hand, are interventions aimed at healthy systems and traits. If no medically recognizable disease or disability can be diagnosed, then the intervention cannot be “medically necessary” and should be described as an enhancement, falling outside the remit of healthcare. One area of medicine where this interpretation is used is by cosmetic surgeons who justify the services they provide by treating “diagnosable” psychological suffering rather than providing a purely aesthetic service. Insurance companies and other funders of healthcare usually insist on being provided with evidence of such issues before providing surgery.  Can psychological suffering be used to justify the use of a BCI? |
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| Legal  The following aspects are legal issues posed by the use of BCIs (Krausová, 2014) and you should consider how the BCI being presented to you fits within the current legal framework and what might need to change. Human dignity Human dignity is a basic legal concept. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states in its Article 1: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed  with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit  of brotherhood.” Part of human dignity is the ability to make your own decisions.  BCIs have the potential either to broaden the autonomy of  a person by offering wider possibilities to make decisions(for example enabling a person to communicate more effectively) or to restrict autonomy so that a person no longer has control (for example, remote controlling of their movements). This remote control of a device is a direct conflict with the notion of human dignity.  Does the BCI allow for equal and respectful relationships between humans? Who should have the power to remotely control any device? Freedom of thought The right to freedom of thought is set out also in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, namely in Article 18: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.” People’s thoughts have always been private in the past and were not accessible to anyone else. However, BCIs have changed this situation whereby we can record and stimulate brain activity.  which is a threat to the freedom of thought.  If we are able to monitor what people think, would people be forced to try and control or change their thoughts? How does the BCI presented to you impact on someone's freedom of thought and what could be the consequences of this? Right to privacy Right to privacy is an internationally accepted fundamental human right. According to Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights “[n]o one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation.  Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.” The right to privacy encompasses many elements such as the right of an individual to keep information private and also the control of personnel information. Privacy is important to people and impacts directly on their mental health, the use of surveillance technology has been controversial in many settings such as schools and traditionally private spaces such as toilets.  How could the right to privacy be safeguard if the BCI was to be approved for use?  Ultimately, do the laws around human rights need changing to accommodate technological developments? |
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| Ethical  In putting your views across you should consider the following ethical aspects that have been raised about the use of BCIs (Burwell et al., 2017). Social stigma There is concern that BCIs have the potential to influence or be influenced by the social aspects of disability. Individuals might feel pressured to use BCIs because of the stigma of having a disease. How might the BCI presented become an everyday accepted device that people feel compelled to use?   Fair access BCI devices that enhance a person's capabilities may create new social groups and or unfairness between people. How fair would this be in the workplace for example? Given the rate of development in the area of BCIs, those devices fitted today are likely to soon become outdated. If the device is an implantable device it is likely that it can only be fitted once in a person's lifetime due to the health risks of removing and replacing devices. Therefore, we must consider the longevity of the device.  How do you think the BCI device being presented might be updated in the future?   Humanity and identity Some people are worried that BCIs could turn humans into cyborgs (humans with abilities beyond normal human limitations). Do individuals with BCIs become less human? Do we risk losing what makes us human? There are concerns related to personhood where someone's social identity and personality could change. Some researchers argue that identity changes over our lifetime and can be changed already by medication or alcohol, therefore this cannot be used as a reason to limit the development and use of BCIs. The main debate in this area is over whether those identity and personality changes are a problem that should limit technological development or access to BCIs? |
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