

The Impact of Neuroscience on Society: The Neuroethics of 'Smart Drugs'

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Cognitive enhancing drugs are needed to treat the cognitive dysfunction of disorders, including Alzheimer's disease, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and schizophrenia. However, some of these cognitive enhancing drugs are now being used by healthy people and this lifestyle use is increasing. For example, healthy people are using methylphenidate and modafinil to improve various forms of cognition and task-related motivation. Since there are no long-term safety and efficacy studies in healthy people, this is a major concern, particularly as many people access these prescription-only drugs over the internet. There are also many neuroethical concerns, including the issues of direct or indirect coercion. As a society, it is important for us to consider what forms of enhancement are acceptable and whether certain groups in particular will benefit from enhancement.

In this lecture, we will consider the actions of cognitive enhancing drugs on the brain, their effects on cognition and the impact of the increasing lifestyle use of these drugs on society.