

*Transcript of Video Submission*

*Title- What the novel 1984 teaches us about Neuroethics: A Student discussion of Cognitive Liberty*

[START]

Winston lives under the watchful eye of the government, in a black and grey world. Posters with a mysterious man read “Big brother is watching” and are splattered everywhere.

In Oceania, individuals lack consciousness and are restricted in thought as the government tells them what to believe. Winston and the others endure psychological manipulation and repression of thought.

This is the world George Orwell paints for the protagonist, Winston Smith, in his novel 1984. The regulations imposed within the novel have rendered a dystopian society incapable of independent thought. George Orwell's 1984, portrays the striking importance of the freedom of thought.

The novel leads us to pose questions regarding the ethics of psychological manipulation and cognitive liberty. Should we be able to restrict human thought, or punish people based on their thoughts?

These questions parallel those being asked in the emerging field of neuroethics.

Current improvements in technology and neuroscience warrant new ethical concerns, and neuroethics seeks to study these ethical matters.

Similar to bioethics it assesses the morality of animal and human studies but also seeks to answer questions directly related to people. One issue that constantly comes into play is cognitive liberty.

Cognitive liberty is a term that refers to the basic human right of thought with some of the concepts of privacy and perception applied.

For decades civilizations have valued the importance of freedom of thought. An example of this is the maxim of Roman law “*cogitationis poenam nemo patitur*” meaning ‘no one can be punished for his thought alone’ (Burstow, 2019).

Today it is defined by these ideas: one- people have the right to think both what they think and how they think, two- people have a right for their thoughts to be private, and three- people have the right to alter their own consciousness (Burstow, 2019).

Although the violation of these ideals seems unlikely, such events are already underway. Currently, fMRI allows scientists to monitor brain activity and create vague deductions of emotions and psychological processes.

According to Scientific American “in 2008 a woman in India was convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment on the basis of a brain scan showing, according to the judge, “experiential knowledge” about the crime” (Ienca, 2017).

This technology poses new questions like should we monitor people’s thoughts, and should these thoughts be used to criminalize individuals? Who is allowed to see these people’s thoughts? How do world governments plan to regulate this technology?

Such questions also apply to new medication and therapy

Today, there exist therapies and medication to alter mood and stimulate brain activity.

These brain-altering drugs and treatments pose a risk of being non-consensual and altering a person's thoughts.

New developments in medicine can affect the way people think and feel. Treatments and technologies have been shown to affect memory, desires, mood, and even personality, affecting the most “intimate aspects of our lives”.

Individuals should be aware of the possible impacts of these treatments. Cognitive liberty ensures that this awareness and consent are maintained.

Some argue that psychiatry relies on the disclosure of private cognition and would not have come to existence if cognitive liberty had been reinforced through history.

Although this may be partially true Cognitive Liberty focuses on, the right that everyone should be allowed freedom of thought. should give consent for others to disclose their thoughts, should know the effects of treatments, and be allowed to control their conscience and thoughts.

Cognitive Liberty is essential for a functioning society, we should strive to maintain these ideals. Dystopias like Orwells, portray the picture of what occurs when cognitive liberty is extinguished.

“Everyone has the right to freedom to hold opinions without interference.” (United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights).

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