

Bioethics Research: Contemporary Debates
Spring Semester 2012

'COSMETIC NEUROLOGY' AND THE QUESTION OF AUTHENTICITY

Alexandre Erler

DPhil Student in Philosophy

Lincoln College, Oxford

Date: Monday 02 April 2012 12:15 – 14:00

Location: Hörsaal 2 im Klinikum 1 (Spitalstrasse 21) 2 OG

Abstract:

Current advances in medical technology are regularly opening up new ways of re-shaping our psychological characteristics as we desire. A number of psychoactive drugs and, more recently, different forms of brain stimulation have demonstrated the capacity to enhance cognitive function and mood, and to modify personality, not only in psychiatric patients but also in healthy subjects. Scientists have also been able to selectively erase memories in mice. In the future we can expect to see further developments in interventions of this sort, potentially broadening the scope of what is sometimes called “cosmetic neurology”. In this talk I will consider one major worry that people tend to raise regarding such interventions, namely that they threaten our authenticity. I will describe the two main competing approaches to the concept of authenticity in the contemporary debate, and will suggest that the authenticity worry does have force in certain particular cases of cosmetic neurology. In doing so I will try both to sketch some replies to the critics, and to expose the flaws in some possible construals of that worry.

Contact: Domnița Oana Bădărău +41 (0) 61 260 11 31 or domnita.badarau@unibas.ch

