

## Cognitive Enhancement

Jacob Olitsky, Grade 12, Germantown Academy

The use of non-therapeutic, neurological enhancements should not be legalized until more is known about their side-effects and they are cheaper to purchase. These criteria deal with two large issues regarding neurological enhancers: pressure to use them and fairness. Non-therapeutic neurological enhancement is sometimes referred to as 'cosmetic' neurological enhancement. While there may be nothing inherently wrong with using artificial chemicals to produce cognitive enhancements, the use of cosmetic neurological enhancement will likely have pronounced side-effects on society and these need to be taken into consideration.

Neurological enhancers should not be legalized for use by healthy people until the side effects are better known and understood. Neurological enhancements have been proven to give a mental boost to healthy people, giving them an advantage over their peers who do not use enhancements. In the work place, this will apply pressure on workers to use enhancements in order to boost their performance. If no one else in a given field is using enhancements, then the temptation will exist to start using enhancements to gain an edge; if everyone in a field is using enhancements, then newcomers will need to use them as well to be competitive. For these reasons, if cosmetic neurological enhancement is made legal, it is likely that their use will become very widespread and perhaps even mandatory in some companies. If there were no side effects to neurological enhancers, there would not be an issue with everyone using them. However, the side effects of

neurological enhancers have not yet been adequately studied. Considering that it would be practically impossible to prevent the use of neurological enhancers from becoming so widespread that it is virtually obligatory, it would be best to wait and study the consequences now rather than wait and discover problems after neurological enhancers have been irrevocably integrated with society.

Cosmetic neurological enhancement should not be legalized unless it is readily available to everyone. If enhancers are not available cheaply, then they will give the wealthy another edge over the poor, further stratifying society by wealth. Currently, wealthy students have the advantage of being better able to afford private schooling, tutors, and college. Widespread use of neurological enhancement would add an additional divide between those who can afford to chemically boost their cognitive abilities and those who cannot. The net result of this would be that wealthier people would become smarter or at least better focused than poorer people. Consider two mentally identical children attending the same school: one who can afford neurological enhancers and one who cannot. The first child would be more focused, be able to stay up later, memorize things better, and perhaps even think clearer. The first child would work be able to work more efficiently and for longer hours, giving him/her a clear competitive edge. The wealthy would have even more of an advantage in acquiring jobs and reaching high-paying career paths than they do now. Fairness based on wealth is an important factor to take into account when considering the ethics of cosmetic neurological enhancement.

Removing the current restrictions on neurological enhancement could cause great damage to society. Those wealthy enough to afford enhancement would be

strongly pressured to take them in the interest of short term benefits over possible long term detriments to their health, while those too poor to afford enhancement would find it even harder to get into selective colleges and jobs. Legalization of neurological enhancement should proceed slowly and cautiously, lest the future become like something out of dystopian science fiction.