Biometrics: Big Brother or Guardian Angel Continued ...

Emerging Themes

Finally, the issue is not specifically about imaging and the connections to my earlier work, though informative does not directly apply. Secondly, the technology is here to stay and is likely to improve exponentially, for instance who would have thought in 1980, you would be accessing something called email on a cell phone. Thirdly, there are benefits, especially if passwords are a pain, however the ethical implications are of concern to a large minority. Fourthly, biometrics affects all of us, and encroaches on several aspects of modern life, the ethical, obtaining and the handling of the data, the political, governmental response to terror threats and security issues; and the sociological trading others for instance. Within the reach of these three, the intention is to discuss the affects on the individual and society generally. Specifically looking at the nature of autonomy, trust and the political will imposed by a “state of exception”, which has in some degree suspended 250 years of moral thought related to the individual and society. All of this is somewhat removed from my previous work on privacy and consent, but which will remain in the background as the thesis evolves.

Ian Berle

Doctoral student in CBET

Activities in Brief Continued ...

Contributing to the ongoing public conversation concerning the ethics of abortion Dr Trevor Stammers wrote an article published in the British Medical journal entitled “The Plain of God” in December 2011. Solution, Drawing Command “Theory and Moral Foundations” was the title of a lecture given by Dr Stammers on Saturday 7th January as part of the Society of Apothecaries’ Philosophy of Medicine course. Over recent months the question of organ donation has never seemed too far away from the media spotlight, particularly following the Welsh Assembly’s white paper consultation on an opt-out system for organ donation, Dr Stammers has been involved in a number of events which have looked at the ethical implications behind this emotive topic.

On Sunday 22nd January, he gave a lecture on the ethics of organ donation in Cardiff for CARE Wales. In May, he spoke on the ethics of organ donation at Midstone Hospital for Kent’s Regional Training Day on Organ Donation. On the related theme of the global trade in human organs, Dr Stammers will also be speaking as part of an ethics study module at Surrey University, convened by Dr Anna Gallagher.

Dr Stammers attended the Cambridge University Press 2nd Annual Conference on Teaching Bioethics, in Paris from the 11th-13th April which focused on a draft paper delineating the goals of bioethics education. This provided ample opportunity for networking and promoting the St Mary’s MA course at St Mary’s as well as scope to exchange ideas and best practice from those who are involved in teaching bioethics in different parts of the world. Co-authored with Dr Stephen Bullivant (TPH, St Mary’s), Dr Stammers has a chapter in a textbook on healthcare and spirituality to be published by OUP in July 2012.

Hating Professor Rodney Taylor has recently engaged in an extensive period of teaching and learning. Since December Prof. Taylor has been teaching at Imperial College, London on the second year medical Ethics and Law course and on the intercalated BSc course on Death, Autopsy and the Law. He has also taught on the Diploma in the Philosophy of Medicine course at the Society of Apothecaries, and taught American postgraduate healthcare administrators on MBA courses. In addition to this he has also taught several history of medicine courses and continues as Convener of Examiners in the History of Medicine. As Senior Warden of the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries, Prof. Taylor anticipates becoming Master this summer. Prof. Taylor has also recently become a member of the Management Committee of the King’s College London (KCL) Haematology-Oncology, Tissue Bank, a research biobank licensed by the Human Tissue Authority.

Prof. Hunt gave an introductory presentation on nutrition to technology to higher level pupils at The Charterhouse School, Surrey on 30th February in which he explained why he thought there were theoretical and evidential grounds to conclude that the whole project of science as currently understood is incomparable. For a copy contact huntg@smuc.ac.uk.

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High demands are placed on University governance by the model statute (Section 202 of the Education Reform Act, 1989), adapted by many universities, with its regard to the need “to ensure that academic staff have freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges they may have as their institutions”. The dilemma that universities administrations find themselves in is that, nowadays, so much income comes from external sources rather than endowments or student fees. The influx of such external funds is indeed socially useful. For this reason, proposals that involve the purchase of very expensive equipment are always likely to be favoured over proposals to do theoretical work which is the more intellectually challenging, or the more socially useful. Another kind of distortion, prevalent when the institution has to make the decision based on which proposal will bring in income, is pernicious – erosion of excellence leading to insidious mediocrity. In the case of research council projects, the distortion might take the form of pandering on with the project as described in the original proposal in order to ensure that the reports submitted to the council match the contractual obligations set out in the grant award even if, as a result of the way the research developed, the investigators no longer believe that those obligations represent the best or even a useful way of spending the money. This kind of distortion, prevalent when the institution is deciding which proposals to support, is to make the decision based on which proposal will bring in the greatest income, rather than which is the more intellectually challenging, or the more socially useful. For this reason, proposals that involve the purchase of very expensive equipment are always likely to be favoured over proposals to do theoretical work requiring only pencil and paper, even if the measurements to be made with this equipment are of a routine nature.

Jeremy Ramsden

Research Fellow in Ethics & Emerging Technologies

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Dr Yasemin J. Erden

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Opinion: The Ethics of University Research

Dr. Erden has been invited to be an independent evaluator for the final report (with recommendations for policy) which will be published in autumn 2012.

Activities in brief

Researching Nanomaterials for Food Packaging

In November 2011 Dr. Yasemin J Erdin taught at a training school in Skopje organised by the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST), one of the longest-running European frameworks supporting cooperation among scientists and researchers across Europe. This particular school is part of COST-FAC04 project on Polymer Nanomaterials for Food Packaging (PNFP). On the same COST project Prof. Hunt and Dr. Erden visited Valencia in March for the European conference of this project. During the conference Prof. Hunt gave a presentation entitled "Plantain, Packaging, and Particles: As Vice-leader for the Inter Group Activity (young scientists) Making the Future of Science in PNFP Dr. Erden helped at the conference to organise an early career researchers round table meeting which has resulted in a LinkedIn group being formed as well as plans for future meetings. She has also written a chapter for the book "Ecosustainable Polymers for Food Packaging" (Forthoming, Brill) entitled "Ethics Communication and Safety in the Use of PNFP".

Researching Health Impacts of Nano

Since 2008 Dr. Erden has been a consortium partner in the Nanopharm project an FP7 4-year multidisciplinary European project looking at the health and environmental impact of nanomaterials. The final project conference took place in Dublin in February 2012 which both Prof. Oabayashi and Dr. Erden attended. Prof. Hunt led a survey into client satisfaction with the project, which will go into his report on ‘stakeholder engagement’ to the European Commission. Related publications include: 4th Nanoparticle Report on Stakeholders and their Interests in Nanomodification, Characterisation and Communication, Geoffrey Hunt, Luigi Cavallaro, Darren Hunt and Juan Riego-Sefrín, 09.09.2011, Deliverable 4.1.2; Hunt, G. & Reidiker, M. (2011) "Blasphemy Expert Consensus on Uncertainty and Complexity in Nanomaterial Safety", Nanotechnology Preprints, Vol. 7 (July): 82-98. See: www.nanopreprints.net

Ethics Expertise

Commenting in 2010, Dr. Erden has been invited to become an independent Expert in Ethics for the European Commission, in the evaluation of research proposals submitted to the European Framework Programme. Dr. Erden also participated in The Ethical Governance of Emerging Technologies (EGATS) Consortium Workshop held in Nantes, Belgium in January. The Nuffield Council on Bioethics recently held a public consultation on emerging biotechnologies such as synthetic biology and nanotechnology. The Working Party is considering the common ethical issues raised by such technologies, both past and present, and the implications for policy, governance and public engagement.

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Dr. Erden has been invited to be an independent evaluator for the final report (with recommendations for policy) which will be published in autumn 2012.

Artificial Intelligence

Co-authored with Dr. K. Niggl, Dr. Erden has written a paper on 'Autonomy and Desire in Machines and Cognitive Agent Systems' to be published in a special issue of Cognitive Computing, forthcoming June 2012. Seven universities, ten research institutions and ten industrial partners, from thirteen countries, are teaming up to develop ever more compact and streamlined technology that alsoscales seamlessly into our daily lives. The project leaders have invited Dr. Erden to be part of their Ethics Advisory Board on ethical and social issues relating to the development of these future and novel information and communication technologies (ICT) applications.

Teaching

In November 2011, Dr. Pia Matthews facilitated a symposium on biometric issues and its implications for the disease of Aids and the Brain. This was followed by two moral theology sessions at Canterbury Franciscan Centre in March and two sessions on human dignity at the beginning of the life and living life of the heart in April. Christian evolution has been the focus of two book reviews Dr. Matthews has written recently. She has also expressed her opinion on human dignity and disability to be published in edition 17.2 of the CBET journal. She is also preparing a book for publication by the end of 2012. Natural Law was the focus of a paper presented by Dr. Matthews on fascism and technology at the annual conference of the Association for Science and Ethics in Canterbury. She is also considering the ethical issues raised by such technologies, both past and present, and the implications for policy, governance and public engagement.

The big question is: What does biometrics achieve and at what cost?

Technology aids, my main purpose is to examine the nature of biometric imagery and its effect on individuals and society. In medicine, the use of clinical images supports treatment and medical education. However, can Kent’s aim of not treating anyone as a means to an end, the use of clinical photographs in medical teaching is secondary to the primary use of therapeutic documentation. This recognises the patient’s autonomy and is therefore conducive of dignity, in as much as it comes to other ethical considerations associated with research scenarios. Yet arguably, in biometrics ethical maturity has still to be reached. Much work has already been done by the EU funded REB project, but there is still some unfinished business. On one hand, most of biometrics is associated with maintaining security in and around transport term ini. Is this Big Brother? Whether biometric data is accessed via surveillance cameras to verify individuals, is a pinnaciel notion within itself? If so at what cost of liberty? On the other hand, biometrics is also connected to the maintenance of personal security. An iris scan or fingerprint will verify your identity. In the future passwords will be unnecessary. An iris scan may give you access to online banking or HTML. And your data will be secure from hackers! Biometrics, your Guardian Angel.

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