

Brave New Choices: A Thought Experiment in Bio-Ethics

OVERVIEW: *In this debate, there are three rounds. In each round, you will be presented with a scenario and then offered two choices. The decisions you make shape how you will change and what values you follow. You should try to make each decision based on what is consistent with your values. After you make your choices, you will be asked to debate each other's decisions and underlying values for each choice. NOTE: Each scenario should be taken at face value. The situation will be as described – there are no “tricks” – and you do not need to worry about other “what if” scenarios.*

DIRECTIONS: As a group, read the description for each round out loud and the bullet points at the end of each scenario. Debate your responses and move on to the next round.

ROUND 1: The Brain Chip

The year is 2050. You, like many others, have decided to switch career fields, and you find yourself looking for a new job. Expectedly, the workplace has changed a lot in the last 20 years. Many people say Haraway Technologies is responsible for the shift. In 2027, Haraway released a mass-market “implantable brain chip” (called the CORE-tex). This brain chip has the ability to increase focus, memory retention, and processing speed by 300%. Haraway states that it is safe and reversible, and a growing number of scientists and medical practitioners agree.

15 years ago, the choice to implant COREtex was uncommon. However, now, it is becoming standard. A recent national poll shows that over 65% of professionals use COREtext at work.

After applying to 15 jobs last week, you realize that many competitive employers assume their applicants have (or will be willing to get) a COREtext implant if they are hired. Some companies are offering to buy it for their employees.

You are wrestling with this choice. Part of you doesn't like the idea that something is planted in your brain. Would you really be the same? Still, part of you is curious about the increase in your ability to process information, focus, and memory. You have a family that you care about, and after all, this might help you earn more money to support them.

Over the next 2 weeks, you set a deadline to make a choice:

OPTION A: Implant the chip to increase your job prospects.

OPTION B: Refuse the chip and preserve your unmodified cognition.

What choice will you make?

- Move to the front of the room if you would get the COREtex brain chip
- Move to the back of the room if you WOULD NOT get the COREtext brain chip.
- Explain:
 - Why did you make the decision that you did?
 - What values or principles helped you make your decision?
 - How would you convince others that your choice is the morally correct choice?
 - Does anyone want to switch sides? If so, do so now and explain why you've changed your mind!

ROUND 2: BLINK and You'll Miss It!

Let's imagine, for the sake of this next round, that everyone received a COREtex brain chip. Even if you attempted to avoid it, it is now 10 years later, and the technology is more common than ever. In fact, a majority of your family and friends are using COREtex. Now, you have joined them. You still feel conflicted, but at this point, you at least feel confident that it helped you stay employed.

Unsurprisingly, new technology continues to advance. Haraway Industries has just released a new product called BLINK, which are contacts with digital screen inlays. These "contact-screens" are designed to connect with the COREtex brain chip and offer users a host of options.

To start, BLINK offers you real-time data, analytics, and database searching with the blink of an eye. Haraway states that this function will connect with your COREtex brain chip as a seamless way to access information and increase productivity. Additionally, it can fact-check live conversations and even record your experiences in real time.

Of course, BLINK comes with other features too. Many people seem to be using its "filter mode" to hide or replace unwanted images they come across every day. BLINK claims it can filter out unwanted political advertisements, unpleasant news, and even potentially distressing images as you are walking around from day to day. You can even enable its "mood-matching-filter" which matches what you see to how you feel inside.

You start to notice people walking by trash-filled parks and unhoused people as if they don't exist. They don't seem bothered. In fact, from their facial expressions, they don't seem to notice. It becomes clear to you that a majority of people have started using BLINK, and you are wondering what to do.

In the name of progress, your company has offered you a discount to use these new contacts for work.

Over the next 2 weeks, you set a deadline to make a choice:

OPTION A: Buy and use the BLINK contacts.

OPTION B: Refuse the BLINK contacts.

What choice will you make?

- Move to the front of the room if you would get the BLINK lenses.
- Move to the back of the room if you WOULD NOT get the BLINK lenses.
- Explain:
 - Why did you make the decision that you did?
 - What values or principles helped you make your decision?
 - How would you convince others that your choice is the morally correct choice?
 - Does anyone want to switch sides? If so, do so now and explain why you've changed your mind!

ROUND 3: The PATH Less Traveled?

Recently, after work, you decided to go out to eat with a friend, Jane. You had heard that your friend was up for a big promotion at work. She was really excited about the opportunities it would bring for her family and her career. Unfortunately, you heard she didn't get it. On your way to dinner, your friend brings it up.

"Hey, so," she begins, breathing deeply. "I didn't get the promotion."

"Oh no—that's terrible. I'm sorry, Jane." You look over. "How're you feeling?"

Jane looked back, and smiled. "Well, honestly not that bad. *It is what it is.*"

"Really?" You asked, a bit shocked. "I thought you were really excited about it?"

Jane nodded, "I was, but I'm not now. It's not in my control and I can't change it now. I just try to focus on the things I can control and accept the things I can't change."

"Sure," you said, deciding to drop the conversation. If Jane wasn't bothered, you didn't want to push it.

Later at dinner, you discover that Jane has updated her brain chip with the new "Apatheia" firmware nicknamed the "PATH". Jane explains that it helps to regulate emotions and inner balance. PATH's technology makes your brain chip function as an emotional regulator, calming intense emotions, suffering, and distress. Jane even says that PATH has improved her overall mental health. Previously, Jane had felt disconnected, lonely, and in a state of self-doubt and depression at different times of her life. In fact, you both had regularly discussed this, and you knew Jane was doing therapy and counseling for the past few years. This is partly why you wanted to check in on Jane after she didn't get the promotion—but now, she seems fine.

Jane tells you that her therapist was the person that actually recommended the PATH. You consider all of this information. On one hand, your friend seems much calmer, happier, and all together healthier in the way she feels. On the other hand, you are worried about this technology and its ability to control emotions.

Before wrapping up dinner, Jane tells you that she has a referral discount for PATH. With her referral, yours will be free—forever. No monthly payments, no extra fees. You have a choice:

OPTION A: Take the referral and get the PATH update to your brain chip.

OPTION B: Do not get the PATH update.

What choice will you make?

- Move to the front of the room if you would get the PATH.
- Move to the back of the room if you WOULD NOT get the PATH.
- Explain:
 - Why did you make the decision that you did?
 - What values or principles helped you make your decision?
 - How would you convince others that your choice is the morally correct choice?
 - Does anyone want to switch sides? If so, do so now and explain why you've changed your mind!

Haraway on Trial

OVERVIEW: 20 years have passed since Haraway's introduction and production of their 3 main technologies: COREtex, BLINK, and PATH. Each release sparked a new debate for citizens, and now, that debate has taken the main stage. Haraway Technologies is being investigated by a new Senate Committee called the "Technology Ethics Committee" (TEC). The committee is beginning its hearing by listening to opening statements from the committee members.

DIRECTIONS: Divide into 2 groups. Each group will prepare an “opening statement” for the TEC about whether or not Haraway has committed any wrongdoing or unethical behavior. Write your opening argument on this page. Your goal is to construct a clear and systematic argument that responds to this question:

Has Haraway done anything unethical with their technologies COREtex, BLINK, and/or PATH?

[illegible]

