



NEUROETHICS

RESOURCES FOR SECONDARY EDUCATORS

4.0

Conceptual Foundations of Bioethics: **Overview**

Although bioethics has been around for more than four decades, the field of neuroethics is in its infancy. Philosophers have developed several conceptual frameworks that contain valuable insights concerning the analysis of questions of right and wrong, good and bad. These ethical theories can help us as we struggle with the moral dilemmas presented to us by advances in brain science. In the sections that follow, a variety of theories and methods will be explained with reference to the hypothetical scenario described below.

The Case of David Cleaver:

Mr. David Cleaver, age 58, suffered a massive heart attack while shoveling snow. Medical emergency personnel arrived at the scene within minutes and resuscitated the stricken night watchman. During those minutes, however, his brain was starved of oxygen, resulting in permanent brain damage. Two days later several of Mr. Cleaver's family members met to discuss his treatment and future in the lounge outside the ICU in Thales General Hospital:

Bill (son #1): Dad's heart is beating; he is still alive! We have no right to approve any action that could result in his death.

Jake (son #2): Bill, the doctor said that Dad has no chance of recovery. The fMRI showed no activity in critical areas of his brain. Without the respirator his heart would stop. There is more to be considered here than simply keeping Dad's heart beating.

Bill: Like what? What could possibly compare to Dad's life? We're talking about *life*, about the sixth commandment: "Thou shalt not kill."

Jake: There are dozens of lives involved. Right now, you are not in your store, I cancelled appointments with four clients, Sandy (Bill's wife) is sitting by the phone popping Valium tablets, and the medical bills keep piling up.