

Authenticity and Ambivalence

TOWARD UNDERSTANDING THE ENHANCEMENT DEBATE

by ERIK PARENS

The differences between critics and proponents of enhancement technologies are easily overblown. Both sides of this debate share the moral ideal of being “authentic” to oneself. They differ in how they prefer to understand authenticity, but even this difference is not as stark as it sometimes seems.

As both a participant in and an observer of the “enhancement debate” over the last decade, I am intrigued by how frequently this debate features decent, smart people talking past each other. To suggest a way to understand its structure, and maybe even to gesture toward improving its tenor, I want to do three things. First, I want to suggest that both proponents and critics of so-called “enhancement technologies” proceed from a “moral ideal of authenticity,” although they differ in how they understand it. Here I’m trying to emphasize that critics and proponents share more than they usually remember in the heat of academic battle. Second, I want to suggest that these different understandings of authenticity grow out of two different but equally worthy ethical frameworks, which stand in a fertile tension with each other. I will emphasize that reasons

alone cannot account for why most of us feel more comfortable in one framework than in the other and that none of us feels comfortable only in one of them—we all move back and forth between them, to some extent. Finally, I will discuss two examples to show that, on reflection, none of us should want to speak only out of the framework in which we feel most comfortable. If understanding is what we are after, we should embrace rather than suppress the ambivalence we often experience when we think about specific interventions.

The Moral Ideal of Authenticity

In *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Charles Taylor reflects on the debate between “the knockers and boosters of modernity.” According to Taylor, much of that debate, which simmered in the twentieth century and continues today, is rooted in each side’s different mistake about the same moral ideal. The moral ideal of authenticity, which he says emerged fully at the end

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of the eighteenth century in Europe, is that each of us finds our own way of being in the world. It is my job as a human being to find my way of flourishing, of being true to myself. “If I am not [true to myself], I miss the point of my life, I miss what being human is for me.”¹

Taylor says that this debate about the moral ideal of authenticity is “inarticulate.” He writes, “Its opponents slight it, and its friends can’t speak of it.”² What he means by that somewhat oracular formulation is, I think, important.

When Taylor wrote *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* was still being widely discussed, and Bloom becomes Taylor’s paradigmatic knocker of modernity. Much of *Closing of the American Mind* lambastes American college students (and their teachers) for their self-indulgence and shallowness, which Bloom says they cloak in “a certain rhetoric of self-fulfillment.”³ What Bloom doesn’t get, according to Taylor, is that, even if some students and their teachers are guilty of self-indulgence and shallowness, many in fact are striving to live up to the moral ideal of authenticity. Whether or not they achieve it, they aspire to find self-fulfillment, to become who they really are. Bloom doesn’t get that beneath what he takes to be rampant immorality is the expression of a thoroughly moral ideal.

I am not a serious student of political philosophy and do not mean here to play one. But I need to point out why Taylor thinks it’s not just the knockers of modernity who make a mistake about that ideal. According to Taylor, the boosters’ view of what’s going on is obscured by what he calls “the liberalism of neutrality.”⁴ He suggests that this sort of liberalism (John Rawls is his first cite) has as one of its basic tenets “that a liberal society must be neutral on questions of what constitutes a good life.”⁵ To put Taylor’s now familiar point even more bluntly than he does in *The Ethics of Authenticity* (or in *Sources of the Self*), there is an important respect in which

no theory about living well together can be neutral about what constitutes a good life. A theory about living well together requires a conception of what is good the way seeing requires a horizon. Theories about living well together can pick out different horizons, but they cannot go without one, no matter how fervently we might wish it were otherwise.

In a nutshell, Taylor’s complaint about the “the liberalism of neutrality” is that it forgets its tacit commitment to what he calls “the moral ideal of authenticity.” It forgets that, insofar as it is committed to affirming persons in their own projects of self-fulfillment, it is not neutral.⁶ In their commitment to refraining from spec-

views about what it consists in, and thus about how to achieve it.⁷ (Hereafter I will distinguish between critics and proponents; the labels “knockers” and “boosters” seem to connote simplemindedness, and I’m eager to avoid attributing simplemindedness to either side.)

While the idea of authenticity has a complex history, the core of it is that we are authentic when we exhibit or are in possession of what is most our own: our own way of flourishing or being fulfilled. To be separated from what is most our own is to be in a state of alienation.

Critics of enhancement technologies—and they are a distinguished and heterogeneous lot—worry that



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ifying the particular forms that self-fulfillment should take, liberals of this sort forget their commitment to the goodness of finding self-fulfillment by implementing one’s own life project. Moreover, Taylor suggests, to value self-fulfillment requires a view about the difference between a person who is fulfilled and one who is not. To believe that one understands that difference, one has to have some idea of what being a fulfilled person consists in.

Of course, Taylor is not talking about the debate over so-called enhancement technologies. (“Relativism” is his subject.) I offer his account of the different mistakes made by knockers and boosters of modernity because I want to offer a variation of his claim. Namely, the knockers and boosters—or critics and proponents—of “enhancement technologies” share the moral ideal of authenticity, but they understand authenticity differently: they have different

these technologies threaten our efforts at achieving authenticity. They worry that enhancement technologies will separate us from what is most our own. This is surely not their only worry, but I am suggesting it is central. Later I will emphasize that the difference between critics and proponents is not the same as the difference between political “conservatives” and “liberals”; indeed, some of the most astute and eloquent critics of enhancement technologies are political liberals like Susan Bordo, Alice Dreger, Carl Elliott, Thomas Murray, and myriad others. But I will begin with one version of the critics’ concern, as articulated in *Beyond Therapy*, a report written by George W. Bush’s President’s Council on Bioethics.

In *Beyond Therapy*, Leon Kass and the members of the council (not all of whom are political conservatives) speak at length about, to take but one central example, mood-altering drugs like Prozac. In a word, they are con-

cerned that mood-altering drugs will separate us from the actions and experiences that normally accompany those moods.⁸ They worry that in separating us from those un-drug-mediated experiences, we will be separated from who we really are⁹ and from how the world really is.¹⁰ They write: “As the power to transform our native powers increases, both in magnitude and refinement, so does the possibility for ‘self-alienation’—for losing, confounding, or abandoning our identity.”¹¹

Again, it is not only political conservatives who worry that such drugs will separate us from who we really are. Much of Carl Elliott’s recent book *Better than Well* is a trenchant analysis of what he takes to be the dominant contemporary American conception of authenticity, which holds that to achieve authenticity, we need to buy more stuff from the medical-industrial complex.

Like many of us, Elliott isn’t eager to get too explicit about the alternative conception of authenticity he favors. After all, the concept of the authentic self can seem awfully close to outré notions like “the essential self” or “the real self.” As Elliott quotes someone else saying: “The real self as a belief went out in the 70s.”¹² But he isn’t prepared to jettison altogether the idea of the *authentic* self. “You can buy into the idea of an authentic self without buying into the idea of an essentialist self,” he remarks.¹³

Though Elliott does not try in *Better Than Well* to get clear about his particular take on authenticity, he does in an earlier essay on one of his fondest topics, the stories and characters of Walker Percy.¹⁴ Or at least he gets clear about a fundamental worry that helps us infer what he thinks authenticity is: the worry that a drug like Prozac might separate us from the way the world really is. Elliott invents a character of his own, an accountant living in Downers Grove, Illinois, who comes to himself one day and says, “Jesus Christ, is this it? A Snapper lawn mower and a house in the suburbs?” Elliott invites us to

imagine that we’re this man’s psychiatrist. Should we prescribe Prozac? Or should we think that, “even though he’s in a predicament, at least he’s aware of it, which is a lot better than being in a predicament and thinking you’re not?”¹⁵ As Elliott knows well, Percy himself attributes this basic idea about the value of knowing you’re in a predicament to Soren Kierkegaard, one of the progenitors of at least one understanding of authenticity. Indeed, the epigraph for Percy’s *The Moviegoer* is taken from Kierkegaard’s *Sickness Unto Death*: “the specific character of despair is precisely this: it is unaware of being despair.”

I should hasten to add that neither Kierkegaard nor Percy nor Elliott says it is good to be depressed. They say, rather, that to live authentically is to perceive the world and oneself as they really are, in the face of the ever-present temptation to look away. In our new age of “exuberance,”¹⁶ I hesitate to acknowledge that, on this sort of view, it is better to suffer because of one’s awareness than it is to relieve one’s suffering by looking away. The point is not that suffering is good but that compromising our awareness is bad. Elliott’s worry about Prozac is that it threatens that awareness; it threatens to separate us from who we really are and how the world really is.

Proponents of enhancement, of course, view these same technologies very differently. They see them not as a threat to authenticity, but rather as tools that can facilitate our authentic efforts at self-discovery and self-creation. Indeed, much of Peter Kramer’s *Listening to Prozac* aims directly at the sort of argument one finds in Kierkegaard, Percy, and Elliott. Kramer’s basic argument is that drugs like Prozac do not separate us from what is most our own. On the contrary, they *give* us what is most our own; they free us up so that we can encounter the world as it really is and authentically create ourselves. “There is a sense in which antidepressants are feminist drugs, liberating and empowering.”¹⁷ Prozac does not rob life of the edifying potential for

tragedy; “it catalyzes the precondition for tragedy, namely, participation.”¹⁸ According to Kramer, Prozac enables people to embark on their own quest to find out or create who they really are.¹⁹

Along with Peter Kramer and Jonathan Glover and others, David DeGrazia makes a complementary argument when he invites his readers to consider the case of a young woman who had a traumatic childhood, who currently isn’t leading the life she imagines for herself, and who asks her doctor to prescribe Prozac so that she can transform herself. Of this young woman’s request, DeGrazia writes:

[I]t is hard to see the basis of paternalistically judging that her values and self-conception are not authoritative for her own life—not only for what is good in her life (best interests) but also for what constitutes her life (authenticity). I therefore conclude that Prozac . . . can be an authentic part of a project of self-creation.²⁰

To put the point in the terms I’m employing, DeGrazia makes explicit how the proponent’s view of enhancement technologies is consistent with the liberal commitment to defending the individual’s right to choose for herself what the good life is for her and what her life project will be.

As someone who deeply sympathizes with that position, for now I would just remind us of Taylor’s earlier point about liberal neutrality. In their defense of the individual’s right and obligation to use enhancement technologies to craft her own life project, proponents sometimes forget that their defense grows out of a commitment to a particular view of what it means to be a person: they are committed to the moral ideal of authenticity, to the idea that people who are fully persons should find self-fulfillment. As liberals, proponents are loathe to foist on others their own conceptions of the good, but, like it or not, they must have some idea of what self-fulfillment means. To have an idea of what self-fulfillment is pre-

supposes an idea of what a self or a person is. Below I will offer an example to try to persuade the proponent that her concept of personhood and self-fulfillment is not a thin, formalistic affair; it is thicker than she is accustomed to acknowledging.²¹ (Of course, if the proponent's mistake is to profess too little understanding of what being a fulfilled person is, the critic's mistake is to assume too much.)

Different Frameworks

Although there are important disagreements among both critics and proponents, I want briefly to describe what I take to be an important difference *between* critics and proponents.

I have come to think that these different understandings of authenticity grow out of what I will call two different ethical frameworks. By "frameworks," I mean a constellation of commitments that support and shape our responses to questions about, among many other things, new enhancement technologies. When I refer to those different frameworks as "ethical," I use that term in its broadest possible sense, as designating habits of thought and being. Were it a more felicitous neologism, I would refer to "psycho-ethical frameworks," to emphasize that these frameworks have an important psychological (and perhaps aesthetic) dimension. Instead, I will say simply that I believe these different conceptions of authenticity grow, at least in part, out of different prerational experiences and understandings of our selves and of our proper relationships to the world.

These frameworks are built of answers to questions that do not have only one good answer. In another place I have described some of those questions at length,²² but for now I will merely mention some: Can we meaningfully distinguish between "natural" and "artificial" human interventions into nature? Should we conceive of technology as morally

neutral or morally loaded? What do we mean when we claim that we are free, and to what extent are we free? And so forth.

To emphasize that these two frameworks are intimately related even as they are importantly different, I will dare to remind you of a single figure in an oft-cited book. In the book of Genesis, Jacob's wife Rachel, who was unable to bear children, begs him: "Give me children, or I shall die." Jacob famously responded to Rachel's injunction with a question, "Am I in the place of God?" With this question, Jacob expresses one of the

solidarity."²³ Leaving aside whether Sandel's predictions are accurate, we can discern in his words the sort of view symbolized by Jacob's question: if we forget that life is a gift—albeit from an unknown giver—we will make a mistake about the sort of creatures we really are and the way the world really is.

But this very same Jacob, who exhibits a kind of gratitude that many today associate with "religion," also exhibits a radically different stance, which Genesis also celebrates. After all, as has been noted more than once, Jacob, the very one whose name

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book's central and best-known ideas: that we human beings are not the creators of life; we are creatures, whose job is to remember that life is a gift. It is our responsibility to express our gratitude for the mysterious whole, which we have not made.

This sort of attitude does not require a commitment to any particular religious tradition, indeed to any religion at all. Many a pagan environmentalist (like Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature* and *Enough: Genetic Engineering and the End of Human Nature*) adopts such an attitude. Many a left-leaning critic of corporatization (like Rich Hayes, who directs the Center for Genetics and Society) adopts it. Michael Sandel invokes the secular version of this idea when he writes, "If bioengineering made the myth of the 'self-made man' come true, it would be difficult to view our talents as gifts for which we are indebted, rather than as achievements for which we are responsible. This would transform three key features of our moral landscape: humility, responsibility, and

would become Israel, was "the first genetic engineer"; he was the one with the creativity to fashion a device ("rods of poplar and almond, into which he peeled white streaks" [Gen. 30:38]) with which he induced his uncle's goats to produce only the valuable "speckled and spotted" (Gen. 30:39) young. According to Genesis, and it seems to me much of Judaism, our responsibility is not merely to be grateful and remember that we are not the creators of the whole. It is also our responsibility to use our creativity to mend and transform ourselves and the world. As far as I can tell, Genesis and Judaism do not exhort us to choose between gratitude and creativity. Rather, or so it seems to this pagan, it is our job to figure out how to maintain that fertile tension, making sure that neither stance gets more than its share.

When we observe scholars and others debate about "enhancement technologies," I believe that we often see people who have at least for the moment adopted either the gratitude or creativity framework, as I am call-

ing them. As one side emphasizes our obligation to remember that life is a gift and that we need to learn to let things be, the other emphasizes our obligation to transform that gift and to exhibit our creativity. As one framework emphasizes the danger of allowing ourselves to become, in Heidegger's famous formulation, "standing reserve," the other emphasizes the danger of failing to summon the courage to, as Nietzsche put it, "create" ourselves, to "become who we are."

Indeed, sometimes the same scholar moves between frameworks in the same talk. I believe I saw my friend Eric Juengst, a philosopher who has thought deeply about human enhancement, do just that during a lecture at Hiram College in the summer of 2004; he operated out of the creativity framework when he criticized those who would oppose all efforts at extending life, and he operated out of the gratitude framework when he criticized efforts that would bring normal aging under the control of medical science. Again, most of us can be comfortable in both frameworks, even if most of us are considerably more comfortable in one framework than in the other. I should hurry to add: moving between frameworks, being ambivalent, seems to me to be a sign of openness and thoughtfulness, not confusion.

It's not only because I love that we find both attitudes in one figure that I invoke Jacob. Yes, it is essential to remember that none of us who is thoughtful inhabits only one of those frameworks. But it is also useful to remember that the figure of Jacob appears in a book that is "religious." In fact, one might tell a creation story about bioethics that has the field grow out of a battle between two titans, both of whom were theologians: Paul Ramsey, the Ur-critic of biotechnology,²⁴ and Joseph Fletcher, the Ur-proponent.²⁵ If one looked to the history of presidential commissions that broached the enhancement question, one would notice that each of them has brought out theologians from

both the gratitude and creativity frameworks: one side reminds us of the importance of letting things be, eschewing arrogance, and so on, while the other reminds us with equal passion of our obligation to find the courage to become creative in our efforts to ameliorate human suffering.

Suggesting that we find religious soil at the roots of the critical and the enthusiastic stances toward enhancement helps me bring to the fore concerns I have about both sides of the enhancement debate. Beginning with the side I feel most comfortable on: the critics. Sometimes, when we critics speak, we sound as if we have forgotten or don't even fully appreciate that, in principle, the creativity framework is as worthy as the gratitude framework. When we try to make the case "against perfection" or when we raise problems with the "ethic of willfulness,"²⁶ we risk forgetting that at the core of that ethic is the noble impulse to be creative, to mend and transform ourselves and the world. Were we to speak, instead, of "the ethic of *creativity*," we might be more prone to give the other side its due.

By calling attention to the religious element of the commitments on both sides, I am trying to emphasize what I take to be an obvious but under-appreciated fact: the proponent is not as neutral as she sometimes seems to believe. She has no more than anyone else escaped the maw of extra-rational commitments.

Having identified these two ethical frameworks, I need to emphasize several caveats. First, I've tried to make abundantly clear that I don't think the difference between critics and proponents is the same as the difference between people who are religious and those who are secular. You find both kinds in both camps. Second, the distinction between the gratitude and creativity frameworks is not the same as that between political conservatism and liberalism; conservatives and liberals operate out of each.

Finally, I do not for a moment forget that distinguishing between the

gratitude framework of the critics and the creativity framework of the proponents is a *very crude heuristic*. The outlines of the gratitude and creativity frameworks are neat only in speech. Nonetheless, I think that when we engage in debates about enhancement technologies, it can help to recognize that people on both sides are speaking out of the framework in which they feel most comfortable. And I think it is crucial to recognize that none of us, if we are reflective, feels comfortable only in one of these frameworks. Even if we settle in one for the sake of debating each other, in our day-to-day lives we shuttle between them. One might say that in our day-to-day lives we are often more prone to allow ourselves such thoughtfulness—and ambivalence—than when we sit down to engage in scholarship.

The Limits of the Frameworks

I have suggested that the gratitude and creativity frameworks deserve equal respect and that we should aspire to balance the commitments and insights of both. I should point out, however, what I think is patently obvious: most readers of this journal live in a time and in places where the gratitude and creativity frameworks do not receive equal weight or enjoy equal respect. The two constellations of commitments are not in balance. At least on my interpretation of the current scene, the creativity framework dominates.

There is after all no money to be made in exhibiting gratitude, at least to the extent that exhibiting gratitude means letting things be. The money, as John Berger and Thomas Frank and Susan Bordo and Carl Elliott and myriad others have pointed out, is in persuading consumers that they should garner the courage to purchase a product that will help them shape their life projects according to their own discovery of what is good for them. As the advertisers for a breast enlargement company called Mentor put it in an ad they called

“Amber’s choice”: “Check it out for yourself. Then do it for yourself.” Amber isn’t the sort of young woman who can be co-opted by anybody else’s conception of the good. As the ad tells us, her “pet peeve” is “People who pressure me into doing things” and her “life’s mission” is to “Always be open to new ideas.” As if we need to be told that a company called Mentor could appeal to someone who wasn’t open to new ideas!

For the rest of this essay I want briefly to discuss two “cases” that I think should make honest inhabitants of both frameworks acknowledge insight on the “other side.” First to a difficult case for proponents.

To get at the difficulty, I need to rehearse a couple of facts about heterosexual men and Viagra. The drug enables men who cannot otherwise achieve or sustain an erection to engage in sexual intercourse. For the sake of this discussion, let’s assume that the erectile dysfunction we’re talking about is rooted in a plumbing, not a relationship, problem. Insofar as many heterosexual couples consider sexual intercourse to be an essential part of a loving relationship, which in turn they take to be an essential part of being a fulfilled person, Viagra can help to facilitate relationships and fulfill persons, and thus surely is a good thing.

According to the experts, Viagra works because most men are, sexually speaking, simple. If a pill can get blood to a man’s penis, then he will experience the desire for sexual intercourse. Or as the experts put it, there is no gap between arousal and desire for most men. Arousal essentially entails desire.²⁷

That’s not true for many women. To get from arousal to desire, many women need to experience what is often summed up as “intimacy.” Alas, Viagra can’t bridge that gap. It can get blood to a woman’s vagina, but it won’t necessarily make her experience the desire for sexual intercourse.

This is disheartening if you’re Pfizer and you want to break into the women’s market. So what’s a drug

company to do? One obvious strategy is to try to close the gap between arousal and desire. As one female Pfizer researcher told a *New York Times* reporter, “What we need to do is find a pill for engendering the *perception of intimacy*” (my emphasis).²⁸ If Pfizer could develop a pill that could make women feel like they were experiencing intimacy, then the gap could be closed, and the market opened.

Whether that Pfizer researcher was speaking ruefully or in earnest, she raises an interesting question: What should reasonable proponents think about a pill “for engendering the perception of intimacy”? The easiest re-

sponse is, of course, “Look, that’s not a way of shaping a life project that I admire, but who am I to say?” While I share many of the assumptions behind that rhetorical question and acknowledge its power, I think that response gets us too quickly off the hook of thinking.

The second but by now nearly automatic response is: “Look, there’s nothing new here. We’ve always used ‘medicine’ to create the perception of intimacy. What do you think alcohol is?” I will not rehearse here the problems that beset arguments from precedent. For now I will merely point out that it doesn’t follow from the fact that humans have long sought a way around the need for intimacy that we should now be happy to get the world’s largest industry in on the action.

I think that honest proponents will acknowledge that the idea of a pill that would, in the absence of genuine human intimacy, create the per-

ception of intimacy, is perplexing—even for the clearest thinking and toughest minded among us. I think the honest proponent will find this case troubling because she has a thicker conception of what a person is—and thus how one fulfills the moral ideal of authenticity—than she is accustomed to acknowledging (at least in debates about enhancement technologies). An essential part of being a fulfilled person is experiencing intimacy with another person. In words that Taylor might use but that a proponent might at first find foreign: to live up to the moral ideal of authenticity, to be a true or authentic or fulfilled person, one needs to discover and cultivate intimate relationships with other people. If a person’s relationship depended on a pill to engender the perception of intimacy, we—proponents and skeptics alike—would think that person was not living truly or authentically or was missing out on an essential, if not always easy, part of life.

I’m not saying that a reasonable proponent would want to outlaw a pill for the perception of intimacy. But if some proponents are indeed perplexed by some cases, it would deepen the understanding of the rest of us if they would offer an account of their perplexity. In doing so, they would likely find themselves temporarily adopting language native to the gratitude framework. I think they would find themselves appealing to the idea that there are some human problems we should not use technology to eliminate. Or, as Jim Edwards has recently put this idea: “Usually we demand that the facts answer to us, to



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our needs that the world be ordered as we see fit; some facts, however, have the demand on their side: it is we who must answer to them.”²⁹

On this sort of view, instead of using technology to erase the problem that is the need for intimacy, we should let it be.

Notice, however, that no one from either framework would say, “Let the problem be,” full stop. Rather, she would say something along the lines of, “Instead of using a pill to make that problem disappear, we should use some other means—like words—to try to grapple with it, if never fully ‘solve’ it.” Nor does adopting the critics’ language of gratitude entail giving up altogether the impulse to creatively transform the self and world. How could any of us simply give up that impulse? The language of gratitude merely gives the speaker a way of expressing what she takes to be a threat to authentic personhood. To fully express that, the proponent would likely be thrown back on some variation of the claim that a pill for intimacy would threaten to separate us from the true, if impoverished, state of a relationship without intimacy. She would, I think, be thrown back on some version of the claim that it is better to be without genuine intimacy and aware of it than to be without genuine intimacy and unaware of it.

Having briefly discussed a problem for honest proponents, now I want to discuss still more briefly a problem for honest critics. As many know, increasing numbers of men and women are seeking surgery to transition to the sex opposite the one they were born into. So-called transgender surgeries enable people who were born with male anatomies to adopt female anatomies (and people who were born with female anatomies to transition to male anatomies).

Now if one is, as I am, most comfortable working out of the gratitude framework, then one’s first response to transgender surgery is that it is a very bad idea. We should let bodies be, not “mutilate” them. People who

want to transition should, rather than changing their bodies, help the rest of us to change how we think about sexual and gender variation. We should realize that this is one more opportunity for all of us to learn to affirm the wide and marvelous range of phenotypic variation.

If, however, you listen to people who have had to decide between living with a body they experience as alien and transforming their bodies into the shape they feel to be true, I think you will have to acknowledge the problem with that initial reaction. In his careful and persuasive book, *Becoming a Visible Man*, Jamison Green, a female-to-male transgendered person, reflects on the very responses voiced by those who feel most comfortable in the gratitude framework. The bottom line for Green, however, is that he did not feel at home in the body of a woman. In that body, he did not feel fully “present” or “visible” and thus was not able to share in what he takes to be genuine intimacy. He writes, “The only proof [that one has achieved real presence] is in the strength of one’s connectedness with others, the kind of connectedness that I could not truly feel until I became a visible man.”³⁰

When someone hears this sort of argument, she has two obvious, if crude, interpretive options. She can say that this thoughtful and eloquent man is deceiving himself (he operates with “false consciousness”), or she can accept his claim that surgical transformation is a necessary condition for him to experience connectedness, intimacy, and relationship.

I cannot adopt that first, “false consciousness” response. If Jamison is not reflective and clear thinking about himself, then none of us is. So I’m left with the option of accepting his claim that the surgical transformation makes genuine relationship possible for him. This realization can be troubling for someone working out of the gratitude framework, who, like me, is committed to learning to let healthy bodies be, and who worries

that medical technologies can threaten our authentic encounters with ourselves and the world.

But it seems to me it would be a bad mistake to let that commitment or worry get in the way of appreciating that, however you understand authenticity or flourishing or personhood, the capacity to enter into intimate relationships must be central. Different from the “pill for intimacy,” which undermines the purpose of achieving genuine intimacy and relationship, Jamison’s surgeries seem to promote that purpose. So, as much as it disturbs my neat theoretical objections to using medical means to shape selves, or disturbs my commitment to letting healthy bodies be,³¹ I cannot deny that in this context, the medical means seem to promote a purpose I should endorse. As one working out of the creativity framework can too quickly forget that means matter, one working out of the gratitude framework can too quickly forget that purposes matter.

Coda

Socrates famously distinguishes between *dialectic* and *elenchus*: between arguing for the sake of understanding a question and arguing for the sake of refuting one’s opponent. It is my impression that too many of our arguments about “enhancement technologies” aim not at understanding, but at refutation. Arguments aimed at refutation sometimes take up so much passion that their authors cannot recognize any insight on the other side.

I have tried to suggest not only that we should recognize the value of the framework in which we are less comfortable, but that most of us actually do recognize its value. Indeed, when we’re not waging argumentative war, we sometimes find ourselves exploring our ambivalence, shuttling between the frameworks we’re more and less comfortable in. As I’ve tried to say, it would be very difficult to live in this culture and not appreciate the virtues of the creativity and grati-

tude frameworks. Each of us is, as it were, Jacob.

It may be that on other topics, passionate refutations are warranted and productive. But I don't see how it helps when we're talking about the sorts of self-shaping technologies that I've just mentioned. Given that, by definition, we're talking about interventions that someone thinks aim at improvement, and given that pursuing them will usually entail different sorts of considerable costs to the individual, some large and potentially noble human ideal seems at work. Insofar as one is, critics should be slow to criticize. But if we are trying to talk together about the difference between interventions that stand a good chance of promoting "authenticity" and those that don't, then proponents should be slow to stand up and cheer. Or at least they should be quick to acknowledge their perplexity.

Anyone who has used the word "authenticity" or has tried to track how others use it knows how slippery it is. It is tempting to say that we use it in different ways at different times because we are confused, or because we are trying to dress up our preferences in fancy philosophical garb. I have tried to suggest, instead, that its slipperiness reflects the fact that we think about authenticity in different ways; we think out of different frameworks at different times. I do not have an account of why we adopt this framework and then that one. Nor do I have an account of how we should evaluate this or that use of the frameworks. My hope is merely that by calling attention to these two different frameworks and to the fertile tension between them, I have made a small contribution toward helping us to aim less at refutation and more at understanding—less at talking past and more at talking with.

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Foundation on Ethics and Education—and also for insightful comments from three anonymous readers for the *Hastings Center Report*. And I am deeply indebted to Arthur Frank, whose writing³² and conversation have helped me embrace the "Socratic" mode of bioethics I find most congenial.

References

1. C. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 29.
2. *Ibid.*, 18.
3. *Ibid.*, 16.
4. *Ibid.*, 17.
5. *Ibid.*, 17-18.
6. Here I will do no more than say I'm keenly aware (a) that Rawls has responded to this sort of charge, switching his focus over the years from justice to legitimacy, from metaphysical to political conceptions, and so on (Jim Nelson, personal communication) and (b) that Taylor is but one of many who level this sort of charge. Another is Michael Sandel in *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
7. I believe one finds this sort of argument in Ronald Dworkin's *Life's Dominion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993); I'm referring to his claim that we disagree so profoundly about abortion because "we interpret the idea that human life is intrinsically valuable in different ways" (70).
8. President's Council on Bioethics, *Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness* (New York: Regan Books, 2003), 238-39.
9. *Ibid.*, 253.
10. *Ibid.*, 255.
11. *Ibid.*, 294.
12. C. Elliott, *Better Than Well: American Medicine Meets the American Dream* (New York: Norton, 2003), 48.
13. *Ibid.*, 49.
14. C. Elliott, "The Tyranny of Happiness," in *Enhancing Human Traits: Ethical and Social Implications*, ed. E. Parens (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1998): 177-88.
15. *Ibid.*, 180.
16. P. Kramer, "Goodbye, Darkness: The New Science of Exuberance," *Slate*, September 20, 2004, at <http://slate.msn.com/id/2106883>.
17. P. Kramer, *Listening to Prozac* (New York: Viking, 1993), 40.
18. *Ibid.*, 258.
19. In another essay ("Kramer's Anxiety," in *Prozac As a Way of Life*, ed. C. Elliott and T. Chambers [Chapel Hill: University of

North Carolina Press, 2004]) I have tried to show that Kramer sometimes suggests that Prozac can be used to "discover" the authentic self (that is, to free the self from genetic and environmental constraints) and at other times suggests that Prozac can be used by an individual to "create" her authentic self. Whether talking in terms of discovering or creating the self, Kramer seeks to show that Prozac can promote as opposed to thwart "authenticity."

20. D. DeGrazia, "Prozac, Enhancement, and Self-Creation," in *Prozac As a Way of Life*, ed. C. Elliott and T. Chambers (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004): 33-47, at 41.

21. M. Nussbaum, "Human Functioning and Social Justice: In Defense of Aristotelian Essentialism," *Political Theory* 20 (1992): 202-46; and M. Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," in *The Quality of Life*, ed. M. Nussbaum and A. Sen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993): 242-69.

22. E. Parens, "Creativity, Gratitude, and The Enhancement Debate," in *Neuroethics in the 21st Century*, ed. J. Illes (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

23. M. Sandel, "The Case Against Perfection," *Atlantic Monthly* (April 2004): 51-62, at 60.

24. P. Ramsey, *Fabricated Man: The Ethics of Genetic Control* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1970).

25. J. Fletcher, *The Ethics of Genetic Control: Ending Reproductive Roulette* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1974).

26. Sandel, "Case Against Perfection," 56.

27. M. Loe, *The Rise of Viagra: How the Little Blue Pill Changed Sex in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

28. G. Harris, "Pfizer Gives Up Testing On Women," *New York Times*, February 28, 2004, C1-2.

29. J. Edwards, "Concepts of Technology and Their Role in Moral Reflection," in *Surgically Shaping Children*, ed. E. Parens (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, forthcoming).

30. J. Green, *Becoming a Visible Man* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 169.

31. E. Parens, "Is Better Always Good?" A Special Supplement to the *Hastings Center Report* 28, no. 1 (1998): S1-S16.

32. A. Frank, "Emily's Scars: Surgical Shaping, Technoluxe, and Bioethics," *Hastings Center Report* 34, no. 2 (2004): 18-29.