

# True to the Autonomous Self

A Conceptual Analysis of Authenticity in the Enhancement Debate

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## Abstract

The possibilities of enhancement technologies increase rapidly. However, some are met with ethical suspicion. An argument that is central in the debate between opponents- and proponents of enhancement technologies is the argument of authenticity. Opponents argue that certain technologies endanger authenticity, whereas proponents claim that enhancement technologies can help people become their authentic self. This thesis analyses how both sides of the debate utilize the concept to find out how useful a concept is that is used to defend polar opposite positions.

Opponents of enhancement see life as a project, the meaning of which can only be determined by looking inward. The concept of authenticity they use can be called self-discovery; the authentic self is there to be discovered. Proponents of enhancement on the other hand argue that not self-discovery but self-creation is what true authenticity is. Engaging in projects of self-creation can help people to become who they want to be. The authentic self can thus be formed.

Both sides defend a different position, but share a core understanding of authenticity, namely that it is a moral ideal, a view what a higher life should look like. If the debate would not focus only on the differences between the several theories, but rather on what they share, the debate could truly progress. Both sides of the debate are equipped to deal with certain hard cases better than their opponents. Recognizing the value of the opposing position is the first step in helping the debate forward. Applying the right theory to the right situation shows that all theories are valuable and the confusion concerning the concept of authenticity is unnecessary.

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## 1. Authenticity in the Enhancement Debate – An Introduction

Medical technology is a field in which advances are almost exclusively met with enthusiasm. It is not hard to understand why, for better medical technology means better treatment of diseases which in turn will lead to a higher quality of life, more welfare and heightened life expectancy. However, it has come to a point where the technology is so advanced; it can be used in different ways as well. Whereas using medical technology to treat the diseased and disabled is considered ethically sound, some other possible uses of medical technology are met with ethical suspicion. These uses are considered enhancement and aim at making people better than well.

The term enhancement is a term that is often used in bioethics. It characterizes interventions designed to improve human form or functioning beyond what is necessary to sustain or restore good health.<sup>1</sup> Enhancements then are interventions to improve human form or function that *do not respond to genuine medical needs*, where the genuine medical needs can be defined in terms of three categories.<sup>2</sup> First, disease, impairment, or other kinds of illnesses, second, as departures from normal functioning or third by reference to prevailing medical understandings. Enhancement is thus contrasted with treatment or therapy, which are interventions responding to a genuine medical need. A highly relevant example of enhancement is cosmetic psychopharmacology. The term cosmetic psychopharmacology is coined by Peter Kramer in his book *'Listening to Prozac'*, to refer to the use of psychotropic medications by individuals who are not really ill but want to become better than well: more energetic, socially confident and attractive in self-presentation.<sup>3</sup>

Ethical scholars are on the fence about enhancement. Opinions range from highly conservative to extremely liberal, from do not enhance at all to enhance as much as you can, from it is morally impermissible to it is morally obligatory. These scholars, as philosophers tend to do, make use of arguments which are all interesting. However, one argument is

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<sup>1</sup> Juengst, E., *What does Enhancement Mean?*, In *Enhancing Human Traits: Ethical and Social Implications*. Edited by E. Parens. 29–47, Georgetown University Press, Washington D.C., Washington, 1998, p.29

<sup>2</sup> DeGrazia, D., *Enhancement Technologies and Human Identity*, *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, Volume 30, 261-83, 2005, p.263

<sup>3</sup> Kramer, P.D., *Listening to Prozac*, Penguin Books, New York, New York, 1993

especially interesting to investigate further. This argument is the argument of authenticity. But what makes this argument interesting in particular?

The interesting part about the argument of authenticity is that it is used by both opponents of enhancement technologies as well as proponents of enhancement technologies. Both sides to the debate appeal to one concept to argue for polar-opposite positions, or at least so it seems. On the one hand, authenticity is used to set moral limits to enhancement projects while on the other hand it is argued that enhancement technologies can be used to enhance authenticity. It is always interesting from a philosophical point of view to take a closer look at a seemingly straightforward concept, which is usually taken to mean something like “realness”, when it is used by two sides in a debate.

Because something is definitely up with the concept of authenticity, this thesis will try to pinpoint what is so special about it. Central will be the question: when two sides of the enhancement debate appeal to one concept of authenticity, exactly how useful is the concept then? Do we need it or could we do without it? To answer this question, the thesis will consist of three further chapters next to this first chapter. In chapter two I will introduce the way opponents of enhancement technologies understand authenticity and personal identity; to find out what the concept means to them and how it is used to strengthen their position, as well as reflect critically on their argument and their use of the concept. The third chapter will explain how proponents of enhancements understand authenticity and personal identity. Again, their position will critically be reflected upon. When a clear understanding has been forged of both sides of the enhancement debate and the strength of their arguments it is time to take a step back in chapter four and ask: so now what are we talking about? What do we say when we use the term authenticity? What does the concept mean and is this in line with the way it is used in the debate? Furthermore, the work of Erik Parens will be discussed who stated that the polar opposite positions are not as opposing as they might like to think. It will then be concluded that while both sides to the debate share a core in their understanding of the concept, but they have interpreted it in different. Authenticity as a concept is thus only useful when sharply defined and applied to the right level of debate. The enhancement debate lacks this sharp definition thus far.

## 2. Opponents of Enhancement

Enhancement technologies need to be met with ethical suspicion according to its opponents. Some think it should be banned entirely, while others think there are moral limits as to how far the enhancement project should be allowed to progress if it is not banned universally. The latter position is the philosophically interesting one, while 'enhancement' as a concept is very broad. Think for example of cosmetic surgery, cosmetic pharmacology or genetic enhancement. It is hard to find justifiable grounds on which a total ban on enhancement is plausibly defensible. The predominant view they share shows authenticity as setting moral limits to the project of enhancement. Their use of the concept of authenticity stems from a certain perception of the self or personal identity. To understand their argument of authenticity, first their take on personal identity will be discussed.

### 2.1 An Opponent's View on Personal Identity

Opponents of enhancement generally have a particular view on life and personal identity, which Carl Elliot has discussed at lengths. The view is made up of two parts, where the first part can be split up in two parts.

The first part, where Elliot is following Michael Walzer, is the notion of life as a project.<sup>4</sup> This notion can in turn be split up in two parts. The first is the idea that whether our lives have meaning or significance is largely dependent on how we live them. The idea that how we live our lives will determine their significance is tied to the second part of the notion of life as a project, namely that our lives are planned undertakings which we control and which we are, to a large extent, responsible for. Of course external factors play a part in our lives, consider for example luck, but those are never enough for us to depart from the responsibility we feel for our lives. While this may seem like an obvious idea, it is far from a universal picture. Consider for example the idea that life is entrusted by a higher Entity, giving it meaning and significance. Life's purpose then is always to follow God's or Allah's will. Life is given to us; we just have to live it. Another example is the idea of life as a socially given project. Life's

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<sup>4</sup> Elliot, C., . The Tyranny of Happiness: Ethics and Cosmetic Psychopharmacology, In *Enhancing Human Traits: Ethical and Social Implications*. Edited by E. Parens. 177–88, Georgetown University Press, Washington, D.C., Washington, 1998 p. 181 quoting: Walzer, M., *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad*, Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press 1994

purpose then is to fill the position of our parents and do that to the best of our ability: life as a collective project over generations. These examples show that the notion of life as a project, to which we give meaning and significance, and for which we are largely responsible is not as obvious a conception as it appears to be.

The second part of the view on identity by opponents of enhancement concerns what constitutes the good life. Answering the question: “How should I live?” to them is a matter of looking inward, because there is no single universal way of living a meaningful life.<sup>5</sup> That there is no one universal way to live a life seems obvious: people live different lives and there is no single way of living that can objectively be considered as the best way. The answer to the question of how to live will differ from person to person and each person has to discover his individual answer. Each ‘self’ is different and unique; for a life to be a good life, a meaningful life, a life properly oriented toward the good, we have to get in touch with ourselves<sup>6</sup> or in a way ‘true to ourselves’.

These two parts constitute a certain perception of personal identity, which is connected to a certain view on authenticity. Throughout this thesis, this view will be referenced to as the self-discovery view of authenticity, opposed by the self-creation view of authenticity.<sup>7</sup> The distinction between self-discovery and self-creation stems from Neil Levy.<sup>8</sup> He makes this distinction to differentiate between two rival conceptions of authenticity and to make a case for his own concept of authenticity. The distinction will prove quite useful for the project at hand and therefore it will be used throughout this thesis to distinguish the opponents of enhancement, who utilize the self-discovery view of authenticity, and the proponents of enhancement, who utilize the self-creation view of authenticity. As stated, the self-creation view will be discussed later, but the focus for now will be on the self-discovery view. This view identifies the ‘self’ as partly given, there to be discovered. This can especially be seen in the second part of the explanation of personal identity above, where it is urged to be true to oneself. The concept of each person having a way of living that is uniquely his own, an original life to be discovered through the project of life. Now we know that opponents of

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<sup>5</sup> Elliott, C. *The Tyranny of Happiness: Ethics and Cosmetic Psychopharmacology*, In *Enhancing Human Traits: Ethical and Social Implications*. Edited by E. Parens. 177–88, Georgetown University Press, Washington, D.C., Washington, 1998 p.181

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p.182

<sup>7</sup> More on the self-creation view in section 3.1

<sup>8</sup> Levy, N., *Enhancing Authenticity*, *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Volume 28, Number 3, 2011

enhancements make use of a specific view on personal identity which is linked to their view on authenticity. It is not yet clear what that concept of authenticity precisely is however, so the next section will explain that.

## 2.2 Authenticity as Self-Discovery

The self-discovery view described above is what Carl Elliot has called “an ethics of authenticity”; a notion he derived from Charles Taylor.<sup>9</sup> But it may not yet be clear why this particular view on identity and the good life would result in a critical view on enhancement. This next section will describe the arguments used against enhancement, like cosmetic pharmacology, through authenticity as self-discovery.

Given the ethics of authenticity, the meaningful life is connected to the authentic life. The life that is unique per person, the life that is truly one’s own. That connection harbors the possibility to live an inauthentic life as well, which is seen as a wasted life; a life that did not meet its potential. An example mentioned by Elliot is that of a German who idealizes the life of the American Indians and consequently spends his weekends in the Bavarian countryside wearing a loin cloth and living in a teepee.<sup>10</sup> The point is not that there is anything wrong with that life per se, the problem arises when it is not the true life of the German. This kind of inauthenticity lies at the root of the worries about cosmetic psychopharmacology, according to Elliot. This is best explained in his now famous quote: “it would be worrying if Prozac altered my personality, even if it gave me a better personality, simply because it isn’t *my* personality.”<sup>11</sup>

So the ethics of authenticity connects the meaningful life to the individual, through stressing the importance of the uniqueness of a life. People will feel less meaningful when they feel their lives are not unique. This argument is echoed by the President Council on Bioethics, in their report ‘Beyond Therapy’. They also recognize the ethics of authenticity in a way, they state that we do not live in a generic human way; we desire, act, flourish, and decline *as* ourselves, as individual. To be human is to be someone, not anyone with a given nature,

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<sup>9</sup> More on Charles Taylor in section 4.1

<sup>10</sup> *The Tyranny of Happiness*, p.182

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p.182

given natural abilities, and a real history of attachments, memories, and experiences, acquired largely by living with others.<sup>12</sup> Our way of living is essentially unique.

The worry then is that new biotechnical powers promise to transform what it means to live that unique life, your individuality. The result is the possibility for 'self-alienation', or abandoning our identity when we use enhancers like Prozac to alter our identity for the better. We become alienated from our true self. The fundamental worry expressed then is that a drug like Prozac might separate us from the way the world really is. The question should then be: is it better to be in a predicament but at least be aware of it, or be in a predicament and think you are not?<sup>13</sup> Elliot and the President Council seem to think the former. 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. The point is not that suffering is good, but that compromising our awareness is bad. Elliot's worry about enhancements like Prozac is that it threatens that awareness; it threatens to separate us from who we really are and how the world really is.<sup>14</sup> Enhancements like Prozac, Elliot suggests, reconcile someone with inauthenticity, and thereby makes her miss the point of her life. Best of all to live authentically, but if we cannot, it is better at least to recognize the gap between how we live and how we ought to live. Prozac stills that inner voice which we are better off hearing.<sup>15</sup>

Lastly, there is a connection between an ethic of authenticity and the idea of self-fulfillment. Self-fulfillment is an essential constituent of a meaningful life. Again, that may sound like an obvious idea, but it is in fact very different from an ethic that says your life is meaningful if you have pleased God, filled the shoes of your parents, or met the code of honor. Self-fulfillment entails discovering your own values, pursuing values you develop for yourself, and utilizing your talents. Elliot points at Taylor again when he states that this pursuit of a meaningful life is a moral ideal. What makes it a moral ideal is that people feel *called* to do this. They feel as if they would be wasting their lives if they did not, they feel that this kind of life is a *higher* life.<sup>16</sup> This calling presents a duty to oneself; it is presented as a calling from *within*: the idea of discovering yourself. A meaningful life is a fulfilling life, and fulfillment is

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<sup>12</sup> The President Council on Bioethics, *Beyond Therapy*, 2003, p. 293

<sup>13</sup> *The Tyranny of Happiness*, p.180

<sup>14</sup> Parens, E., *Authenticity and Ambivalence: Toward Understanding the Enhancement Debate*, Hastings Center Report, Volume 35, Number 3, May-June 2005, 34-41 p.36

<sup>15</sup> *Enhancing Authenticity* p.3

<sup>16</sup> *The Tyranny of Happiness*, p. 184

something that you discover and create on your own, through life of work, and the life of family and household.<sup>17</sup> The interesting part of this leg of the argument lies in the lurking contradiction for opponents of enhancement technologies. For if the way to lead a meaningful life is through self-fulfillment, and self-fulfillment is a function of work and social relationships, enhancers like Prozac would be the answer. For Prozac offers the opportunity to do better work, and be more enthusiastic and happy in maintaining your social relationships. However, living a meaningful life is also tied to living an authentic life, a life which is truly your own, there to be discovered by looking inward. From that perspective a drug like Prozac can seem deeply disturbing and problematic, for what could seem less authentic than changing your personality through an anti-depressant? What could be further from the “simple life” than a life dependent on cosmetic psychopharmacology?<sup>18</sup> On this ticket, Elliot recognizes the oppressive side of an ethic of authenticity. For if you find yourself unhappy, or lead an unfulfilling life, not only should you pursue happiness but you should pursue it aggressively; for if you do not, you would be failing yourself or even wasting your life. This may result in a general acceptance of cosmetic psychopharmacology which we should be weary of according to Elliot; for if happiness is no longer a right, but becomes a duty, it amounts to the tyranny of happiness which gives cosmetic psychopharmacology a certain status that it perhaps should not have.

These considerations mostly focus on cosmetic psychopharmacology and changing identities. But as stated earlier, enhancement technologies are not limited to cosmetic psychopharmacology. Cosmetic surgery is another form of enhancement that may be met with ethical suspicion, albeit for different reasons. The argument of alienation from a true self may in part apply to cosmetic surgery while changing physical appearance can lead to reconciliation with inauthenticity, for you appear to be someone you are not. Margaret Little expands on this argument, through an appeal to ‘suspect norms of appearance’.<sup>19</sup>

The most general case she presents is that of a woman, increasingly distressed and dissatisfied with her size-eight body and the enormous gap she perceives between that body

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<sup>17</sup> *The Tyranny of Happiness*. p. 185

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p.186

<sup>19</sup> Little, M.O., *Cosmetic Surgery, Suspect Norms, and the Ethics of Complicity*, In *Enhancing Human Traits: Ethical and Social Implications*. Edited by E. Parens. 162–76, Georgetown University Press, Washington, D.C., Washington 1998 p. 163

and the pictures of feminine physicality ubiquitous in popular culture, requests a series of surgeries that will bring her closer to the paradigm exemplified by super models – extensive liposuction, recontouring the cheekbones, perhaps a rib extraction or two, all finished up with breast augmentation.<sup>20</sup> One may say that life has dealt her a bad hand in that her body does not fit the ideal of beauty in her society and Little recognizes that not everything that is unfortunate is unfair, but society can be blamed for something. Society is entitled to having certain preferences or even norms on beauty; that is not morally problematic. It becomes more suspect when society ‘enforces’ its norms upon people: when failing to live up to these norms results in excessive, or even cruel, costs imposed by society. Little mostly focuses on suspect norms of society, but I mention her line of argument to show that not only cognitive enhancements can be morally problematic; some physical enhancements can be equally problematic.

Recall Elliot’s last argument, the tyranny of happiness. If the woman described above finds herself leading an unhappy and unfulfilling life, an ethics of authenticity requires her to pursue happiness aggressively even if that means cosmetic surgery. However, like with Prozac, what could be further from an authentic life than happiness as a result of a change in appearance? Cosmetic surgery, as well as cosmetic psychopharmacology, reconciles one with inauthenticity and it would be better to recognize that you are in a predicament, not fitting the beauty-bill, and be aware of it; than being in a predicament and thinking you are not. Little notices that cosmetic surgery in this way not only endorse suspect moral norms of appearance, they in fact end up reinforcing them; which of course would make the predicament even worse for it would continue on for generations to come.

### 2.3 Critical Reflection

So the problem with enhancements is that they may lead to inauthenticity. They lead away from the true self (the German living the Indian life), alienate from our true personality and how the world really is (compromising awareness), and invoke the tyranny of happiness (aggressively pursue happiness). So opponents of enhancement, like the President Council and Elliot, suggest that enhancement technologies should at least be met with ethical

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<sup>20</sup> *Cosmetic Surgery, Suspect Norms, and the Ethics of Complicity*. p. 164

suspicion and caution. In specific cases Elliot may allow enhancements but the general idea throughout his theory seems to be that enhancement technologies are ethically suspect.

However, while the self-discovery model of personal identity has intuitive appeal, there are some critical points to take into consideration. This section will discuss one of these considerations: what internal features of the person should be regarded as constituting the inner voice defining what the authentic choice is?

This point of critique stems from Alexandre Erler and focusses on the self-discovery model of personal identity. Recall the second leg of the model, stating that the answer to the question: “how should I live?” can be found within, since there is no single universal way to live a meaningful life. In a way, one has to listen to that inner voice that tells us what is valuable for us, what ends to pursue and how to act in certain situations. Now consider the case as described by Erler.

A man is introverted, it shows in all his test scores, he cannot be considered a social animal and enjoys reading a book or engage in conversation with some close friends. He has never expressed extraverted tendencies, which he would not be able to express or be even aware off. Yet, thinking he will become more popular with his peers and thus happier, he starts taking Prozac. He wishes he was more outgoing and hopes that the drug will change his preferences and behavior. This ‘unhappy introvert’<sup>21</sup> now has to deal with two separate, yet incompatible, inner voices: the one telling him that he is really an introvert and the one urging him to strive for social success. The challenge for the self-discovery model now lies in explaining what internal features of the person should be regarded as constituting the ‘inner voice’ defining what the authentic choice is for the unhappy introvert. Erler argues that while the introvert’s personality provides a natural candidate for the inner voice that is being betrayed in his pharmacological makeover, a justification is still needed for preferring that candidate and disregarding the introvert’s desire for social success, but the same holds for the contrary choice.<sup>22</sup>

A possible candidate for such a criterion was described by Marya Schectman, who opposes her view from that of Harry Frankfurt. Frankfurt proposes that we can become alienated

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<sup>21</sup> Erler, A., *One Man’s Authenticity is Another Man’s Betrayal*, *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Volume 29, Number 3, 2012 p. 260

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p.263

from our lives, and so fail ourselves, when we cannot control or direct our actions. Schechtman proposes a view that she calls the self-expression view. The self-expression view states that we are alienated when our lives do not express our nature. These are possible, and maybe even plausible candidates, however, it would go too far to discuss her theory in entirety here. For further discussion on the self-expression view as criterion to determine what one's true nature is see: '*Self-Expression and Self- Control*'<sup>23</sup>

The criticism discussed above could prove challenging to opponents of enhancements. But to find if they have to be dealt with at all it is good to take a look at the opposing position now, for if the proponents of enhancement technologies make an indisputable claim, we can leave the opponents' challenges for what they are and instantly become proponents of enhancement technologies.

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<sup>23</sup> Schechtman, M., *Self-Expression and Self-Control*, Ratio, Volume 17, 2004 p 409-427

### 3. Proponents of Enhancement

Thus far, only one side of the enhancement debate has been discussed. The previous chapter described the position of authors like Elliot, who feel that it is wise to meet enhancement technologies with some ethical suspicion. In particular, the argument of authenticity was discussed. Opponents of enhancement technologies feel that enhancements can make you live an inauthentic life, a life which is not truly your own. Furthermore, enhancements can reconcile one into inauthenticity, making you miss the point of your life and separating you from who you really are and what the world is really like. But in the last section it became clear that the theory should not be taken for granted; there are some obstacles to overcome for authors like Elliot. Therefore, it is wise to look at the alternative theory and see what the proponents of enhancements have to offer. For if it is clear how both sides of the debates make use of the concept we can determine how useful the concept of authenticity truly is, and if it proves to be useful in what ways.

The following chapter will describe the position of the proponents of enhancement technologies. Their position can be considered an extrapolation of the research done by Peter Kramer, published in his landmark book *'Listening to Prozac'*. In this book he reports that a lot of his patients would think of their anti-depressant mediated self as their authentic self. So when he stopped the medication, they would claim to feel 'not themselves'. Kramer notes how strange the claim sounds and asks: 'But who had she been all those years if not herself?'<sup>24</sup>

In a way this is the position most proponents of enhancement technologies hold. They echo the feelings of Kramer's patients, claiming that enhancements like Prozac can be a gateway to becoming your authentic self. This position opposes the self-discovery model described earlier and is called the self-creation model. Furthermore, according to proponents of enhancement technologies there are conceptions of authenticity that make sense of the claims made by Kramer's patients and upon which Elliot's worries seem misplaced. This will be discussed in section 3.2.

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<sup>24</sup> *Listening to Prozac* p. 19

### 3.1 A Proponent's View on Personal Identity

In section 2.1 the distinction between self-discovery and self-creation has been shortly addressed. Thus far, only the self-discovery view on authenticity has been discussed. To understand the self-creation view on authenticity, this section will briefly discuss how proponents generally view personal identity and how from that concept they understand authenticity.

To understand the self-creation model, it is necessary to first clarify the distinction between numerical and narrative identity, for it is a distinction which is used a lot by proponents of enhancement. Numerical identity in this context is the least relevant, but it is useful to understand for it can create a framework in which to understand narrative identity, self-creation and authenticity. Numerical identity then, deals with the question of what makes someone considered at a particular time one and the same individual as someone considered at a different time.<sup>25</sup> There are a lot of philosophically interesting questions that can be asked considering numerical identity, but for the purposes of this thesis I would like to point attention to numerical identity's counterpart: narrative identity.

This sense of identity raises the characterization question: which actions, experiences, values, and character traits can be ascribed to a particular person? Which of these characteristics make her the person she really is? Narrative identity is the form of identity one struggles with during an identity crisis.<sup>26</sup> So what would be a helpful response to the characterization question? DeGrazia answers as follows: 'you are the individual who is realistically described in your self-narrative of inner story.'<sup>27</sup> However, just having a narrative identity is not enough for us. We want our inner story to go in a certain direction, influence who we are, for we want to be a certain way or a certain kind of person. The interest we have in shaping our lives concern the project of self-creation.

Self-creation then, refers to the conscious, deliberate shaping of one's own personality, character, other significant traits (e.g., musical competence, athletic prowess), or life

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<sup>25</sup> DeGrazia, D., *Human Identity and Bioethics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, 2005 p. 82

<sup>26</sup> Schechtman, M., *The Constitution of Selves*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1996 p. 74

<sup>27</sup> *Human Identity and Bioethics* p.83

direction.<sup>28</sup> Someone is engaged in self-creation when she makes a conscious plan for herself, for example graduate university, and goes out of her way to meet this goal in the end. The opposite of this is to just fill the roles set out for you without conscious and deliberate thinking about who to be and how to get there. Self-creation suggests that you can become the person you want to be, even if that means changing your personality and character. This stands in stark contrast with Elliot's remarks about enhancement technologies. For the question can be asked: if someone deliberately changes her personality and character, will the resulting person really be the same? Where self-discovery enthusiasts would answer negatively, David DeGrazia states that a negative answer would be profoundly mistaken. To DeGrazia identity is about self-conception, what a person considers most important to who she is, her self-told inner story. That means that it is ultimately up to the person what counts as her and what counts as not-her; the story is hers to write.<sup>29</sup> However, while writing a self-story is truly a personal endeavor, DeGrazia recognizes that the demands of authenticity may set moral limits to self-creation projects. The next section will explain his argument and why he thinks the argument of authenticity as explained by Elliot and the President Council fails, as well as define the concept of authenticity used by proponents of enhancement technologies.

### 3.2. Authentic Self-Creation Projects

The assertion DeGrazia notices is that certain self-creation projects are morally suspect, or even unethical, because they are inauthentic. To test this assertion DeGrazia first off defines authenticity. Surprisingly, DeGrazia shares his concept of authenticity with Elliot, even though they end up with totally different opinions. Authenticity, to both of them, is in a way to be true to oneself and presenting oneself to others as one truly is. Inauthenticity then would be presenting a false self, to oneself or others. The question to be answered would then be, are there projects of self-creation that would involve presenting a false self to oneself or others thus creating morally problematic inauthenticity? Or, might some self-creation projects run afoul of authenticity in morally problematic ways?<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Glover, J., *I: The Philosophy and Psychology of Personal Identity*, Penguin Books, New York, New York, 1991 p. 131

<sup>29</sup> DeGrazia, D., *Prozac, Enhancement and Self-Creation*, Hastings Center Report, Volume 30, Number 2, 34-40, 2000 p. 37

<sup>30</sup> *Human Identity and Bioethics* p. 109

An example may clarify DeGrazia's position. Consider the following: a teenage boy aspires to be a professional singer; it is what he wants most in this world. He wants the fame, the fortune, and the attention that come with the job. However, he has no sense of rhythm or tune. Let's suppose he knows that his singing capacities are not up to par and that he will never get a record deal without help. If he sets out, *deliberatively and self-consciously*, to play the role of a successful singer (handing out forged demo tapes and posters for gigs that will not happen) his transformation would count as a self-creation project in DeGrazia's theory as well as be inauthentic. However, concludes DeGrazia, it is unclear whether the charge that the self-creation project is inauthentic adds any distinctive moral content. Why would DeGrazia claim this? In the example described the boy is handing out forged tapes and creates other ways of making people believe he is a talented singer. Admittedly, he is being inauthentic but what is worse is that he is involved in deception. He is dishonest to others which is in itself morally problematic. That is explicable by appeal to widely embraced norms for virtue and conduct like: lying is bad; there is no need to invoke authenticity in this situation.

But what happens if the boy does not deceive others, but just himself? What if the boy did not hand out forged demo tapes and posters, but still organized his whole life around his career as a singer which will never happen in the way he envisions? He is no longer consciously deceiving others, but is still involved in an inauthentic project of self-creation through self-deception. The question should then be answered whether self-deception can be considered unethical. DeGrazia presumes that self-deception is not unethical, if the relevant mental states are beyond our control. It is a good possibility that the mental states leading up to self-deception are uncontrollable, assuming self-deception occurs unconsciously. DeGrazia wonders then if conscious and intentional self-deception is unethical, of which he is not sure. But he grants for the sake of the argument that all self-deception is unethical or at least morally problematic. The case of the self-deceiving singer then, involves deception. This may fully explain why his project of self-creation is morally problematic; the charge of inauthenticity does not have to add anything to that.<sup>31</sup>

The demands of authenticity can set moral limits on self-creation; insofar self-creation should not be founded on deception. The example above involved deception in both cases,

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<sup>31</sup> *Human Identity and Bioethics* p. 110

which explains its immorality. But, what if the projects of self-creation do not involve deception, what if people want to change themselves in ways that may be considered untrue to themselves? For we have thus far found that inauthenticity as such does not necessarily add any significant moral content. It may well be that the cases of enhancement described earlier involve people wanting to change themselves in ways untrue to themselves, but is that inauthenticity also necessarily immoral?

DeGrazia mentions three examples, an unconfident and physically unimposing teenager who wants to be more assertive, confident, and physically fit; a physics student who recognizes she is no genius, but has moderate ability and wants to succeed in her major which she finds enjoyable; and a plump, flat-chested young woman who is tired of being told what a wonderful friend and conversationalist she is, who decides she wants to become more physically attractive.<sup>32</sup>

These three individuals are involved in self-creation projects; they deliberately want to change their physical appearance, professional competence or personality. One may remark, critically, that these peoples are untrue to themselves, in changing themselves; thus inviting the charge of authenticity. They are not honest about who they are and their self-creation projects are false. But DeGrazia suggests that this concern is at least partly misplaced, because it is likely that we will find some, or maybe all, of these self-creation projects admirable.

It is easiest to see in the physics student, who exceeds expectations while being honest to herself; which seems rather more admirable than morally suspect. In performing well she utilizes her intelligence and perseverance to the fullest, despite her less than awesome talent. She does not pretend to be something she is not. The same holds for the teenager. Even though he changes himself into something he is not, the charge of inauthenticity will not stick. Claiming inauthenticity in his case would invite the response: 'look for yourself, he is what he is.'

The only case that might be problematic is the last one involving the woman who transforms herself to be sexier. Most problematic would be her decision to undergo cosmetic surgery. Her project of self-creation would involve a great amount of effort as well as time and

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<sup>32</sup> *Human Identity and Bioethics*, p. 110

money. Plus, it may be reflecting socialization into sexist norms of what is considered beautiful.<sup>33</sup> But, DeGrazia argues, what if the woman strongly desires the changes proposed in her self-creation project? On what basis then, are we then claiming inauthenticity? The argument would be that her desire to change her appearance does not really come from *her* but is the result of sexist norms in society. However, this argument is not necessarily one of inauthenticity and could just as well be explained through an appeal to autonomy. The concern about the autonomy of her desires may be legitimate, while the charge of inauthenticity again probably does not add any distinctive moral content. It should be noted here that it is not that DeGrazia dismisses the concept of authenticity in entirety, but rather argues that in these cases an appeal to autonomy can suffice. What then, would that concept of autonomy mean?

DeGrazia utilizes a rather intricate concept of autonomy stating that the concept is surprisingly elusive. Sometimes, autonomy is reduced to liberty or freedom, but this is an oversimplification of the concept. Freedom is the absence of external constraints, but autonomy is much more complicated. Autonomy to DeGrazia is in fact a multi-tier account, which stems from earlier work by Harry Frankfurt and Gerald Dworkin, distinguishing between first-order desires and second-order desires. First order desires then are desires to do certain things, while second-order desires are governing the first-order desires, so that one wants what one wants to want. DeGrazia then goes on to refine this multi-tier account of autonomy to the following: A autonomously does X if and only if (1) A does X because she prefers to do X, and (2) A has this preference and any higher-order preferences relevantly related to X because she (at least dispositionally) prefers to have them.<sup>34</sup> Dispositionally here means: “that one might act autonomously without any conscious higher-order valuation, yet be disposed to approve of one’s first order motivation if the issue is raised.”<sup>35</sup> The example above then would be morally problematic. Not because her choice to have the surgery is inauthentic in the self-discovery sense, but because the sexist norms of society make for non-autonomous action. Her first-order desire is to have the surgery, but her second-order desire is not truly her own, it is caused by sexist norms in society. Therefore, the example

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<sup>33</sup> This concern is also issued by Margaret Little in section 2.2

<sup>34</sup> DeGrazia, D., *Autonomous Action and Autonomy-Subverting Psychiatric Conditions*, *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, Volume 19 p.279-97, 1994 p. 285

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p.284

can be deemed morally problematic. In a sense, this covers what Elliot has said: we find it important to be the authors of our own lives.

DeGrazia's suggestion then is that: "*any self-creation project that is autonomous and honest is ipso facto authentic.*"<sup>36</sup> We have seen why DeGrazia attaches importance to autonomy and honesty. Honesty, because one may autonomously pursue a life involving systematic deception to oneself or others, thus being caught up in a clearly inauthentic self-creation project. The case of the woman striving to be sexier exemplifies why autonomy is in there, for in that case, concerns about authenticity appear to be really concerns of autonomy: is the desire really hers or the result of suspect norms in society? If she is aware of these sexist norms and the influence they have on her desires, but she still decides that she prefers to strive to meet the norms, she acts autonomously and thus authentically.

But, a reply may be, the criteria of honesty and autonomy are beside the point, for seeking to change oneself in such a drastic way is inauthentic in and of itself; one abandons their true self. What is morally suspect is the fact that such major changes are made in something that ought not to be changed, like personality. Essentially, the claims made by DeGrazia in the section above hinge upon the self-creation model but do not really respond to the concerns about enhancement. Changing something as important as your personality in a major way, even if done autonomously and honestly, is inauthentic and thus morally problematic. The following section will discuss DeGrazia's response to this claim.

### 3.3. DeGrazia's Response to the Charge of Authenticity

So the concern is that enhancement technologies change personal identity –or the self- in a fundamental way, transforming someone into an inauthentic version of herself. Such a change then, is objectionable due to its inauthentic nature. DeGrazia sums up the argument as follows:

- (1) Enhancement technology *E* alters a person's identity.
- (2) Altering a person's identity is highly problematic. Therefore
- (3) Enhancement technology *E* is highly problematic.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Human Identity and Bioethics*, p.112

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p. 232

This argument, according to DeGrazia, is founded on a confused sense of personal identity. Recall that DeGrazia made the distinction between numerical identity and narrative identity. The sense of identity at stake in the claim by opponents of enhancement is clearly narrative identity. Enhancement technology *E* changes one's personality, but it is not the case that one person would be destroyed and another would come into existence. But, if it is narrative identity that is at stake, the argument contains a fallacy. Premise (1) holds if and only if it appeals to narrative identity as we have seen. But, (2) is only safely assumed if it appeals to numerical identity. The confusion about personal identity invalidates the conclusion in (3).

But what if there is no confusion in the argument? What if throughout the argument identity is consistently understood as narrative identity? Evidently, (1) would still remain true. But then what happens to (2)? What would be so wrong with changing someone's personality that it would result in (3), if she autonomously and honestly consents to the alterations? The claim, as ushered by Elliot and the President council,<sup>38</sup> would then be that there are some characteristics to personality, certain traits that are so basic to who we are as persons that they form some kind of "core" of our narrative identities. Changing these traits through enhancement technologies would violate this core and result in changing who we are as persons, or even result in a totally different person. This charge can be understood as an elaboration of the charge of authenticity, for violating an inviolable core would result in being untrue to oneself.

There are two things to define next: first, why would it be morally problematic to transform a person into a totally different one through changing her core? Second, how can we determine which traits would make up this inviolable core?

To DeGrazia, it is hardly obvious that changing someone's core is morally problematic. This is a result from the importance he attaches to autonomy. If one autonomously consents to the alteration, how can we then claim that that change is morally impermissible? For it is she who writes her own life story, is the author of her narrative identity; no one else but her. That there would be some traits that are inviolable holds only if one accepts the idea of a

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<sup>38</sup> *Enhancement Technologies and Human Identity* p.270: Elliot refers to "capacities and characteristics fundamental to one's identity" in *A Philosophical Disease*; the President Council speaks of "a human givenness" in *Beyond Therapy*

true self as described earlier. As we have seen DeGrazia does not buy into this notion, but for the sake of the argument assumes that there is a narrative core to each.

Assuming we all have a narrative core, which traits would then belong to it? They would have to be the most basic ones we can think of. But, argues DeGrazia, it is one thing to claim that some trait lies within one's narrative core, another to claim that it is impermissible to *alter* that trait – that the trait is *inviolable*.<sup>39</sup>

Which traits then, would belong to that core? DeGrazia mentions six candidates, of which I would like to focus on two, for they are the most relevant to the discussion at hand. The six DeGrazia mentions are: internal psychological style, personality, general intelligence, the need to sleep a certain amount of time, normal aging, and gender. I would like to focus on personality and intelligence, for they are candidates for traits that belong to an inviolable core that are likely to be targeted by the enhancement technologies that have thus far been discussed. They would fit in Elliot's and the Council's argument as to why enhancements would be morally problematic, so it is useful to look at DeGrazia's counterargument.

First, would personality be a good candidate of an inviolable character trait? We have seen with Elliot that altering personality in a drastic way could lead to alienation or the loss of a connection to how the world really is, which would be a bad thing. That is why opponents of enhancements would be against drastic changes in personality. But, is personality really a trait that would be inviolable? If someone has an unattractive personality, DeGrazia mentions overly cynical and sarcastic or buffoonish, any effort towards changing that personality for the better is generally applauded. If an overly sarcastic guy puts in effort to be less of a nuisance at social activities, his social environment will generally be pleased with that effort. Even if his means to achieve the desired end would be pills, the positive change in personality is welcomed. It should be acknowledged that truly extreme changes in personality could create problems for social recognition or interpersonal relations. This is the worry that is sometimes expressed as "I do not recognize him anymore". But, realistic scenarios do not involve these drastic changes up to a point of zero recognition. Sure, the person will change, but that is the point exactly. The mere possibility of a scenario where recognition is no longer possible does not show that deliberately changing someone's

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<sup>39</sup> *Human Identity and Bioethics* p. 234

personality is problematic in and of itself. The term personality perhaps reminds us too much of the more sacred term 'person', which we do not want changed; for falling out of the 'person' category would have drastic moral implications. But that worry stems from the confusion about identity and the failure to distinguish between narrative identity and numerical identity. Numerical identity is the thing that would be highly problematical if changed through enhancements for it would involve destroying a person and bringing a totally different one into existence, whereas there is nothing inherently wrong with changing narrative identity. Personality understood like this seems to not be a likely candidate to belong to an inviolable narrative core.

Intelligence is another example that is thought-provoking. Taking a pill to raise your intelligence levels thirty points instantly would perhaps make the world a better place, but ethical suspicion may be in order. DeGrazia considers whether intelligence would be a better candidate to belong to an inviolable core but again reaches a negative conclusion. He argues that attentive parents try to improve their children's intelligence all the time through various methods: home environment, education, smart-games.<sup>40</sup> Older people are encouraged to keep mentally active, and even everything in between children and pensioned try to maintain their intelligence or even try and improve. There are no moral objections against these forms of enhancement.

The objection would then be that this is not really a form of enhancement at all, but rather a way to reach one's full intelligence potential throughout their lives. A potential, which is given at birth and is there to be reached, similar to the self-discovery model of personal identity. The objection works best if it appeals to the full level of intelligence determined by one's original genome.<sup>41</sup> However, taking one's original genome as essential to one's true intelligence, or as an inviolable personality trait, seems too reductionistic for two reasons.

First, genes are in constant interaction with the environment, through which they determine our capacities. Taking the genome as more fundamental to intelligence than the interaction with the environment seems arbitrary; there are no good reasons to prefer one over the

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<sup>40</sup> This argument echoes another argument in favor of enhancement technologies often heard in conversation: we try, and have tried, to improve ourselves for thousands of years. Why would this step in making us better be the problematic one?

<sup>41</sup> *Human Identity and Bioethics* p. 237

other. DeGrazia illustrates this point by mentioning the example of his genome having the potential to learn languages. Where he grew up English was the main language, so his English is fluent. But, had he been lost as a baby and raised by bears, he would not have spoken a language at all. So both factors are crucial to his language speaking ability. The same holds for intelligence. Having a fine genome is not enough to make you intelligent, environment is a huge influence on the development of capacities that increase your intelligence. Intelligence thus involves certain *capacities*, not just mere *potential*.

Second, genes change over time. To favor the genome with which we were born, our original genome, would again be arbitrary. Mutations change our genes throughout our lives. If, by chance, a lucky mutation would increase our mental capacities it would make sense to regard the present genome as crucial. It would present a new baseline. The objection could then be that mutations are natural and enhancements are the product of human meddling, which would make increased intelligence through mutations morally acceptable and through enhancement impermissible. But why would this be so? Why would the *means* through which intelligence is increased make a moral difference? We have seen that genes and environment are in constant interaction, and deliberately manipulating the environment to improve intelligence is seen as morally acceptable. Then why would a possibly more efficient way to the same end be morally suspect? Maybe because genetic interventions alter an inviolable core whereas natural influences do not? This claim is false, for both genetic and environmental interventions target the same, namely the properties of our brain and our mental capacities. Thus, regarding intelligence as an inviolable trait belonging to our core is unpromising.<sup>42</sup>

It can be concluded from DeGrazia's argument that he finds the thesis that certain core characteristics are inviolable highly dubious. Furthermore, even the changing of core characteristics through enhancement technologies can be perfectly authentic expressions of an agent's values in self-creation. Authenticity has little or nothing to do with the *degree* of self-change sought and achieved.<sup>43</sup> DeGrazia's conclusion can be seen as an elaboration of his stance on authenticity that has been discussed earlier. Enhancements are ipso facto

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<sup>42</sup> DeGrazia dismisses more possible candidates for core characteristics in *Human Identity and Bioethics*, chapter 6 p. 232-42

<sup>43</sup> *Human Identity and Bioethics* p. 241

authentic if they are sought honestly and autonomously. These two concepts are the only limiting factors to the project of self-creation. How far one changes herself is of moral irrelevance, as long as it is done honestly and autonomously.

However, there is another condition DeGrazia admits to the project of self-creation, which may sound a little odd to anyone who sympathizes with DeGrazia's theory. For he admits to being open to the possibility that some efforts to change core characteristics, assuming there are core characteristics, is wrong or at least highly problematic. This possibility stems from a conversation with Margaret Little, who argued that it would be highly problematic to alter an individual's core traits *for frivolous reasons*. An example DeGrazia mentions is that of someone seeking to make himself less intelligent through neurosurgery just because it would be funny. This type of action then would be morally problematic because they would demonstrate insufficient self-respect.<sup>44</sup> However, DeGrazia does not go into this possible argument in more detail.

### 3.4. Critical Reflection

At the end of section 2.3 I stated that if the claim by proponents of enhancement was indisputable, we could forget about the criticism on Elliot, and just become proponents of enhancement technologies. DeGrazia's take on enhancement and authenticity should be clear now, but is his theory convincing or even indisputable? As we have seen in the last paragraph of the section above, DeGrazia himself sees that there may be reasons to limit enhancement projects but he does not go into this argument in more detail, which is a shame, for the frivolous reasons argument could present a real challenge to his theory. Therefore, this section will explore the frivolous reasons argument in more detail.

DeGrazia mentions that enhancements that are done for frivolous reasons would constitute morally problematic enhancements. They would be morally problematic because they would demonstrate insufficient self-respect. He questions whether a requirement of self-respect would be tied to that of authenticity, as an additional condition next to autonomy and honesty. Being true to oneself then would constitute of autonomy, honesty, and self-respect. The difference however between autonomy and honesty, and self-respect seems apparent. Whereas autonomy and honesty are relatively easy to determine, self-respect in this context

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<sup>44</sup> *Human Identity and Bioethics*. p. 241

seems harder to define. If one pursues a certain enhancement for reasons not truly his own, the enhancement would be inauthentic. If one deceives himself or others in pursuing a certain enhancement the enhancement would be inauthentic. So far, the picture is quite clear. But it is hard to determine a criterion for self-respect, for, as with narrative identity, self-respect seems to be solely up to the one pursuing the enhancement. The same holds for the concept of frivolous reasons. Stating that frivolous reasons would result in morally problematic enhancements would require an objective standard of reasons. There would have to be a certain set of reasons which are considered permissible as grounds for enhancement and another which are frivolous. The example of the enhancement to lower intelligence because it would be funny is unconvincing. Who would make the judgment that this reason is frivolous? If the decision is made autonomously and honestly, why would the ground upon which the decision is made be of any significant difference? Furthermore, the example speaks of someone who decides to lower his intelligence. It is understandable why DeGrazia uses this as an example, for it makes his point more convincing – dumbing oneself down because it is funny seems morally suspect- but the example is hardly an example of enhancement. The definition of enhancement stated in the first chapter clearly speaks of interventions aimed at improving human form and functioning. Toning down intelligence *could* be understood as improvements in certain specific cases, but generally it would not be considered enhancement. Therefore, the argument that this would set moral boundaries to self-creation is unconvincing. It is hard to believe why something like frivolous reasons would set moral boundaries to something that DeGrazia argued to be nearly limitless.

Ineke Bolt interprets the fact that DeGrazia has stated this example but did not go into it in more detail as a possibility of him having certain concerns that are not adequately captured by his theoretical account of personal identity and authenticity.<sup>45</sup> Bolt argues that DeGrazia even seems to need a thicker concept of personal identity, authenticity, and self-fulfillment in order to make sense of his concerns regarding the use of enhancement for frivolous reasons. This leads her to argue that even proponents of enhancement technologies have a less formalistic idea of what being an authentic self or a self-fulfilled person is than they are accustomed to acknowledging, a position that stems from the work of Erik Parens.

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<sup>45</sup> Bolt, I., *True to Oneself? Broad and Narrow Ideas on Authenticity in the Enhancement Debate*, *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics*, Volume 28, p. 285-300, 2007 p. 295

There are some fundamental criticisms that DeGrazia needs to deal with, at least it can be assumed that his theory is not indisputable; the debate has not yet been settled. Therefore, it is time to take a step back and ask: what are we talking about?

## 4. So What *Are* We Talking About?

Thus far, the positions of both opponents and proponents of enhancement technologies have been discussed. The focus in this discussion has been on their use of the argument of authenticity because it is an argument that is used often by both sides of the debate. It has become clear that the concept of authenticity is a very slippery one, a concept that can be interpreted in various ways; none of which can be considered absolutely right or wrong. It appears that the claim of the opponents as well as the claim of the proponents on authenticity can work under a certain conception of authenticity. This chapter will examine what features of authenticity both opponents and proponents have in common, and what can be concluded from those observations. Furthermore, a closer look will be taken at the thesis by Erik Parens that the frameworks from which the different sides of the debate operate stand in fertile tension with each other and that none of us should want to speak only out of the framework in which we feel most comfortable. If the aim of the debate is understanding, we should embrace rather than suppress the ambivalence we often experience when thinking about the project of enhancement, argues Parens. The chapter will conclude with an evaluation of the arguments to see whether an appeal to a concept so slippery and ambivalent is actually useful; or if we can do without authenticity altogether.

### 4.1. The Origins of Authenticity

Both sides of the enhancement debate appear to use the same notion of authenticity. It is most apparent in Elliot's writings but DeGrazia utilizes a similar notion of authenticity, namely the notion that stems from the work of Charles Taylor. In fact, throughout the enhancement debate most of the appeals to authenticity as an argumentative concept stem from Charles Taylor. Taylor never mentions the enhancement debate, but his take on authenticity proves to be very useful to both sides of the debate. Therefore, it is useful to gain an understanding of Taylor's original concept of authenticity, to understand how both opponents and proponents of enhancement technologies have interpreted the concept and made it their own. If their interpretations can be traced back to a single concept of authenticity, we can get closer to truly understanding the concept. If a true understanding

can be formed, it can be determined whether the concept is a useful one or if the debate can do without it.

Taylor starts his argument from a book written by Allan Bloom: *'the Closing of an American Mind'*, which was very critical about how students in the U.S. viewed life. It should be noted that this book belonged to a very specific timeframe and described very specific developments in American culture. It came out in 1987 and became immensely popular. The unease described in the book was thus a hot topic in society. The students were ascribed a shallow relativism, which means that they all held their own values about which no discussion was possible. This point of view was even considered to be a moral standpoint, because one ought not to dispute the values of another. Those values are their business, their life choice and are to be respected. It is a kind of relativism based on mutual respect. Furthermore, this relativism was an extrapolation of individualism entailing a focus on the self. The worry then is that that focus could lead to ignorance towards bigger problems, bigger problems that transcend the individual self.

This trend, which Taylor acknowledges but sees less negatively than Bloom, is fueled by a powerful moral ideal. The moral ideal of being true to oneself: the ethics of authenticity. So authenticity in Taylor's view is considered a moral ideal. A moral ideal then is a view of what a better or higher life should be. Defining better and higher in terms of what we ought to desire. Authenticity thus gives us norms of what we ought to be desiring. This concept is closely connected to the concept of self-realization. Self-realization is sometimes negatively connoted as narcissism, but Taylor thinks this negative attitude is mistaken when taken to be universal.<sup>46</sup> The moral force behind a concept like self-realization, or life as a project, needs to be understood. People sacrifice love-relationships for their work, but the interesting thing is that they feel called to do so in this day and age. They feel that if they did not do so, their lives would fail or be incomplete. Accepting this moral ideal of authenticity leads to a specific kind of liberalism: liberalism of neutrality; neutrality on questions of the good life. What is considered the good life is what the individual strives for in their own way. This is what authenticity is all about: "There is a certain way of being human that is my way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else's life. But this

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<sup>46</sup> Taylor, C., *De Malaise van de Moderniteit*, Kok Agora, Kampen, 1994 p.29

notion gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life; I miss what being human is for me."<sup>47</sup>

Being true to oneself, or being authentic, then is being true to one's originality. Originality is something only the self can define and discover; by defining originality one defines oneself, through realizing a capacity that is truly one's own.

Thus far, the notion of authenticity as described by Taylor reminds of Elliot: discovering a true self while staying true to that self is authenticity. There is a way of being oneself that is there to be discovered. However, there are some hints of DeGrazia's self-creation in Taylor's work. Taylor states that the ideal of authenticity is an idea of freedom: it entails that I can find my own plan of living the good life, independent of the demands of conformity. He says this in connection with the notion of free self-determination, which if taken to the extreme has no limits whatsoever, no things that *have* to be respected in making autonomous choices. However, Taylor also argues that authenticity cannot and should not move along the lines of free self-determination, which would be self-defeating.<sup>48</sup> But still, even though Taylor would probably not agree totally with DeGrazia's self-creation, it is understandable that DeGrazia starts his argument from Taylor's influential notion of authenticity. For Taylor states that authenticity is also creation and construction next to the importance of discovery.<sup>49</sup> DeGrazia's moral ideal of authenticity is thus more focused on autonomy and self-creation for the good life.

#### 4.2. Two Frameworks

As stated before, both opponents and proponents of enhancement technologies appeal to the same core idea of authenticity. But, as we have seen, both sides interpret the concept differently, arriving at seemingly polar opposite standpoints. It is peculiar that both sides of a debate start from the same notion but end up in different places. This section will try to identify where their paths depart and why they do.

Opponents worry that enhancement technologies separate us from what is most our own, while proponents see enhancement technologies as tools that can facilitate our authentic

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<sup>47</sup> *De Malaise van de Moderniteit*. p. 40

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* p. 74

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* p. 72

efforts at self-discovery and self-creation. To determine what constitutes this difference it is necessary to look at the frameworks both sides use. The notion of frameworks in this context is taken from Erik Parens, who states that the different understandings of authenticity grow out of two different ethical frameworks. Frameworks then are taken to mean constellations of commitments that support and shape our responses to questions about, among other things, new enhancement technologies.<sup>50</sup> Parens distinguishes between the 'gratitude framework' and the 'creativity framework', which correspond to the opponents' position and the proponents' position respectively. But what are these frameworks all about?

Parens explains his frameworks through the book of Genesis and the story of Jacob. Jacob's wife Rachel, who was unable to have children, begged Jacob: "Give me children, or I shall die." Jacob then responded: "Am I in the place of God?" The idea expressed would be that human beings are not the creators of life. Human beings are creatures who have to remember that life is a gift and that it is the responsibility of human beings to express a kind of gratitude for the mysterious whole, which we have not made. The sort of view expressed by this kind of argument is that if we forget that life is a gift –from whoever- we will make a mistake about the sort of creatures we are and the way the world is. This is the worry we have seen with Elliot and the President Council.

But it is the very same Jacob, who exhibits a radically different stance as well in Genesis. For Jacob was the first "genetic engineer". He was the one who creatively fashioned a device with which he induced his uncle's goats to produce only the valuable "speckled and spotted" young. Genesis also states that our responsibility is not merely to be grateful and remember that we are not the creators of the whole, it is our responsibility to use our creativity to transform ourselves and the world as well; a standpoint echoing the view of proponents of enhancement technologies.

What is most important then, is that Genesis does not exhort us to choose between these two standpoints. Rather, the point is to maintain the "fertile tension" between gratitude and creativity. Parens argues that most of us can feel comfortable in both frameworks, even if most of us are considerably more comfortable in one framework than in the other. Moving

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<sup>50</sup> Parens, E., *Authenticity and Ambivalence: Towards Understanding the Enhancement Debate*, Hastings Center Report, Vol. 35, Num. 3, pp. 34-41, 2005 p. 37

between frameworks then is rather openness and thoughtfulness than confusion.<sup>51</sup> The point is that none of us inhabits one framework and one framework only. In some cases we feel more comfortable in the gratitude framework while in other cases we feel more at home in the creativity framework. Parens uses two examples that clarify this point. These examples are hard cases for die-hard inhabitants of either framework, in order to make them acknowledge insight on the other side.<sup>52</sup>

This is a difficult case for proponents of enhancement technologies. Viagra is a drug that enables men who cannot otherwise achieve an erection to engage in sexual intercourse. Parens adds that for the sake of the argument we should assume that this is purely a physical, not a relationship problem. Most couples consider sexual intercourse to be essential to a loving relationship, which in turn is considered essential to a fulfilled life. Viagra then can help to facilitate loving relationships, and thus fulfilled lives and is surely a good thing in that sense. Viagra works because men are, sexually speaking, simple beings. The pill's job is to get blood to the penis, so he will experience the desire for intercourse; there is no gap between arousal and desire. This is however not the case with women. Women need something to close the gap between arousal and desire, namely intimacy. Viagra cannot bridge that gap. It can get blood to the vagina, inducing arousal, but it cannot necessarily make a woman desire intercourse. What are you then to do if you are the pill's manufacturer? Maybe, as a researcher of the company stated, the company should aim to create a pill for engendering the perception of intimacy. A pill that can make women feel like they desire sexual intercourse could bridge the gap between arousal and desire.

What should reasonable proponents of enhancement technologies think of a pill that simulates the feeling of intimacy? A response could be that, as long as the choice to take a pill like that is autonomous and honest, it is not my business to interfere. However, this gets us too easily off the hook of thinking, argues Parens. Another response could be that we have always used 'medicine' to create the feeling of intimacy, for example alcohol. But this response still is not really satisfying. Honest proponents of enhancement technologies will acknowledge that the idea of a pill that creates the perception of intimacy in the absence of real intimacy is perplexing. This case is troubling to even the toughest proponents because

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<sup>51</sup> *Authenticity and Ambivalence*. p. 38

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* p. 39-40

we have a thicker conception of what a person is, recall the criticism on DeGrazia's theory by Bolt. An essential part of leading a fulfilled life is experiencing intimacy, if these intimate relationships depended on pills, we would think that that person was missing out on an essential part of life. If there are proponents of enhancement technologies that consider this case troubling, it would show that sometimes it is easier to argue from the gratitude framework, arguing that there are some human issues that should not be resolved through technology. The gratitude framework provides a way to express why these kinds of enhancement technologies are a threat to authentic personhood.

But there are hard cases for opponents as well. Increasing numbers of men and women are seeking surgery to transition to the opposite sex. These transgender surgeries create the possibility for men to become women and for women to become men. People operating from the gratitude framework would be reluctant to endorse these surgeries. Gender is something that may belong to an inviolable core - the true self should be discovered, not created into something it is not. Bodies should be left alone, not mutilated, it is given and losing sight of this giftedness would be bad. If people want to transition, they should rather change how we think about gender variation.

However, some cases will trouble that initial reaction. Jamison Green, a female-to-male transgendered person, reflects on the response of people who are troubled with transgender surgeries in his book: *'Becoming a Visible Man'*. Green did not feel at home in his female body, he did not feel fully visible and was thus unable to share in genuine intimacy. Green only felt true connectedness with others when he became a visible man, before the surgery he was unable to achieve that intimacy.

This argument can be interpreted in two different ways. First, one could state that Green is deceiving himself, that he operates from a false consciousness. This response is immediately refuted by Parens, stating that if Green was not clear thinking and reflective about his true self, then no one is. The second interpretative option would be to accept that the claim that the surgical transformation is a necessary condition for Green to experience connectedness, intimacy, and relationships. But accepting such a statement would be troubling for someone who operates from the gratitude framework; for it involves actively searching to alter the

self in drastic ways to achieve authenticity. Green's surgery seems to promote the capacity to have intimate relationships, a feature central to a fulfilling life.

These hard cases show that: "between the one end of the spectrum, where the argument *for* intervening is strong, and the other end, where the argument for intervening *against* intervening is strong, there will be cases that fall into the zone of ambiguity, where reasonable people will reach different conclusions about the same set of facts."<sup>53</sup> There will be no 'bright line' to separate the cases where intervening is morally justified from the cases where it is morally impermissible. People who operate naturally from the gratitude framework will react differently to these ambiguous cases than people who act from the creativity framework.

Another thing these cases show, is that at least as important as the difference in their standpoints, is the belief they share that we have some knowledge about normal human behavior and how that ought to be. An example mentioned by Parens is that of soldiers going into battle that may be given a drug to dampen somatic markers. These markers would let the soldier know a certain course of action is wrong. This drug then does not seem like the right course of action to both opponents and proponents of enhancement technologies. For the former because the soldiers would lack regret, and the latter because the soldiers would lack moral judgment. Both sides thus agree that soldiers going into battle should fully experience morally what their actions could result in. Blunting those feelings would be wrong.<sup>54</sup>

Important to note then is that Parens concludes in this article that there is a zone of ambiguity between the easy to decide cases. And in that zone, reasonable people may disagree. Given that zone, Parens argues, "we should be skeptical about the fairness of drawing a clear line that separates interventions that are within and beyond "the limit"; the proper placement of such a line will seem somewhat different to reasonable people proceeding from different, equally ethical frameworks."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Parens, E., *Ethics of Memory Blunting and the Narcissism of Small Differences*, Neuroethics, Volume 3, Number 2, pp. 99-107, 2010, p. 104

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. p. 105

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. p. 106

This leads Parens to an interesting conclusion: “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.”<sup>56</sup> Parens’ claim against the enhancement debate is then that many of the arguments are aimed not at understanding, but at refutation. Refuting another’s argument sometimes takes up so much, that authors can no longer recognize insight in the opposing position. And as the examples show, both frameworks have a certain appeal or value under certain conditions. All of us are in a way Jacob as described by Parens, experiencing the appeal of both frameworks. He furthermore argues that the differences between both sides of the debate are not insignificant, but it is rather that the things they share are more significant to furthering the debate.

Where does this leave authenticity? Parens’ reaction could be that we may have started from the same concept, but through the nature of argument, we focused on refuting another’s position therefore missing the value that position may have to our standpoint.

#### 4.3. The Value of Authenticity as a Concept

By now, a clear understanding of the concept of authenticity should have been formed. We have seen thus far that both opponents and proponents of enhancement technologies appeal to the concept of authenticity that stems from Charles Taylor. Taylor envisioned authenticity as a moral ideal, which means that being true to who you are leads to a higher life. For both opponents and proponents then, authenticity can lead to a higher life; or the good life. An authentic life is a flourishing life.

However, we have also seen that both sides to the enhancement debate interpret authenticity in different ways, ending up with different conclusions. To the opponents enhancement technologies can threaten authenticity by reconciling people into inauthenticity; while to proponents enhancement technologies can bring the authentic self into existence. The question should now be: how valuable is a concept that is used to defend polar opposite positions? Can authenticity play a useful role in the debate or is it a mere placeholder for other ethical commitments?

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<sup>56</sup> *Authenticity and Ambivalence*, p. 40

With Parens we have seen that it would be shortsighted not to recognize the value of the opposing framework. While there may be agreement on some cases at both sides of the spectrum, there will always be disagreement on certain cases. Therefore, we should be skeptical about the fairness of a clear line separating cases in which we find enhancement morally impermissible from cases in which we think enhancement is morally justified. This line of reasoning would prescribe a case-to-case method of dealing with enhancement technologies, but that would as such be insufficient; for then we would lose some important features of both sides.

First, Elliot and the President Council stay true to what we feel is important about being a person. It is undeniable that every reasonable person would feel some moral unease with numbing down soldiers to feel no regret or moral objections in war. There is more to persons than a fundamental self-determination. The thicker concept of authentic personhood that the theory of Elliot answers to the moral intuitions we have surrounding the intimacy pill or the amoral soldiers. The flourishing life then is living up to this image of what a person is, and appreciate the giftedness of life. This point is echoed in Parens' work, when he states that no matter how good we become at creating life forms in the laboratory, we have not created our species. We have been thrown into existence by an accident or force we still cannot comprehend.<sup>57</sup> And this sense of giftedness should be respected.

But, DeGrazia's theory on authenticity is useful as well. His claims about authenticity work on a different level, making sure the choices we make are truly our own and therefore morally unproblematic. This more liberal stance may give rise to faster technological advancements and suits the liberal societies most of us live in today. Whereas opponents of enhancement technologies may have problems with sex-change surgery, the autonomy centered approach of DeGrazia suits our time. Through autonomous choice, a person born in the wrong body can become truly authentic. This point is echoed by the second leg of Parens' argument, that there are of course many things we *can* comprehend and we use that ability to even re-create ourselves. We have been shaping ourselves for years, even if it was not our intention.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Ethics of Memory Blunting and the Narcissism of Small Differences* p. 106

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* p. 106

Then there is Parens' take on the debate, which appears to be aimed at truly moving on and advancing. He makes a convincing point when he states that we should be skeptical about the fairness of drawing a clear line between what should and what should not be allowed to be done: "only a dogmatist would insist that we are creatures *or* creators. Only a dogmatist would insist that just one feature of our nature is salient as we contemplate the extent to which we should shape ourselves in the future."<sup>59</sup>

We have thus ended up with three different concepts of authenticity, who do share a certain core. That core would be Taylor's moral ideal, all concepts of authenticity discussed in this thesis say something about what the good life could look like. The original life, there to be discovered by looking inward and the autonomous life, created by making choices that are truly one's own and the shared understanding of authenticity, appreciating that both other concepts have valuable assets. The claim is then, that all three could be useful in the debate. However, while they differ so much, they are useful at different levels of the debate. The next section will discuss the practical consequences of the analysis made in this thesis.

#### 4.4. Consequences for the Debate

The debate about enhancement technologies can be seen as three legged: before the technology has been developed, when the technology is actually available, and in the doctor's office. On each level, the debate can be traced back to authenticity, and on each level a different understanding of authenticity is most suitable. This section will go over the three levels of debate and show which definition of authenticity is most useful at that level.

First, when a certain enhancement technology is in development but not yet available there may be discussion on the moral permissibility of the technology. One can imagine public debates on certain technologies in development and whether we should want this technology. This debate is helped with a certain concept of personhood, what it means to be a person and what features we find important in the broadest sense. Elliot's theory suits this level of the debate best, for it provides a thick concept of personhood. The moral ideal of authenticity shows whether the technology in question can be morally acceptable or if it goes against what we find important to being a person. If this technology stays true to what we find important, it can be morally permissible. It can be said that Elliot's theory is more

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<sup>59</sup> *Ethics of Memory Blunting and the Narcissism of Small Differences* p. 106

conservative with respect to enhancement technologies, but under certain conditions even Elliot will condone some enhancement technologies. DeGrazia's more autonomy-focused theory appears to miss such a thick concept of personhood and is therefore less suited at this stage; even more so because the decision at this level will provide policy for whole societies. Whether the individual makes an autonomous choice then is of lesser importance.

Then, when the technology is readily available, another discussion will take place. The object of this discussion will be to determine whether someone wants or even needs the enhancement. Here, DeGrazia's focus on autonomy and making authentic life choices is more suited. When someone is contemplating taking Prozac for example to alter their personality, DeGrazia's theory leaves more freedom which is appealing in a liberal society. One can determine for themselves if they honestly want the change in personality, but when they do the theory leaves them freedom to engage in a self-creation project; which is admirable in many cases. DeGrazia's theory in this sense is a lot more practical than Elliot's, almost hinting at being a decision procedure whether a certain enhancement is right. If the first- and second-order desires are in line, one can engage in the enhancement of choice without any moral objections. As long as the conditions of honesty and autonomy are met, the project of self-creation is ipso facto authentic.

Lastly, there is the discussion on an individual level, in the doctor's office. Does this specific person need, want or deserve this specific enhancement? Parens' view on the enhancement debate captures all the nuances of the valuable assets of both positions. This makes it perfectly suited for debate on an individual level. It may be unpractical to utilize Parens' theory to further the debate on a universal scale, but when dealing with individuals he is right in saying that it would be hard to define a bright line between what is, and what is not permitted from a moral point of view. The concept of authenticity is thus also a very personal concept, next to it being universally applicable under certain theories. Some patients will experience themselves as authentic when confronted with the details surrounding their proposed enhancements, whereas others will state that they need Prozac to truly be their authentic selves.

Therefore, authenticity can be considered a useful concept, as long as it is understood that both sides of the debate appeal to something different. It is important for both sides to

realize what they share when they make use of the argument of authenticity, namely that authenticity is a moral ideal. Furthermore, even though Elliot and DeGrazia utilize different concepts of authenticity, both concepts are to be considered useful when clearly defined and applied to the right level of debate. For it would be shortsighted not to recognize that all theories have been criticized and that the other theory is sometimes better equipped to deal with a certain situation. The central question of this thesis was: when two sides of the enhancement debate appeal to one concept of authenticity, exactly how useful is the concept then? Do we need it or could we do without it? The answer, as shown in this thesis, is that there is no one concept of authenticity. Both sides of the debate share a certain core, namely that of the moral ideal, but define authenticity differently. The usefulness of authenticity as a concept thus depends on whether the opposing sides are open to the other's position and accept that it seems that there is no one theory that can deal with every specific case better than the rival theory.

## 5. Conclusion

This thesis has discussed opposing positions in the enhancement debate in order to evaluate a commonly returning argument: the argument of authenticity. In order to do so, the thesis consists of four chapters. The first chapter gave a brief overview of the enhancement debate and the relevance of the argument of authenticity. Enhancement was taken to mean interventions designed to improve human form or functioning beyond what is necessary to sustain or restore good health. Examples of these interventions are taking Prozac to make an extravert out of an introvert or having surgery to improve physical appearance. The peculiar thing about the argument of authenticity was that it was used by both opponents of these enhancements as well as proponents. This leads to believe that there exists confusion about the concept which makes for an unclear debate. Consequently, the central question of this thesis was whether the concept of authenticity is useful at all when opposing sides in a debate appeal to it.

The second chapter then investigated how the opponents of enhancement technologies appealed to the concept of authenticity. Opponents of enhancement technologies often view life as a project, in which discovering the good life is a question of looking inward. Nobody else but you can determine what constitutes your true self. This take on life leads to a self-discovery view on authenticity. Enhancement technologies then can threaten the true self through reconciliation with inauthenticity. It is better to be in a predicament and be aware of it than being in a predicament and not being aware of it. Opponents of enhancement technologies do not state that suffering is bad, but rather that stilling our awareness is. Enhancement technologies threaten to separate us from who we really are and how the world really is. A meaningful life is an authentic life in which one stays true to who one is. However, we have also seen that for opponents of enhancement technologies the challenge remains to determine a criterion on which to decide which inner voice is true: the one stating that you are really an introvert, or the one asking for the change to become an extravert.

The third chapter explicated the opposing position, the one of proponents of enhancement technologies. Proponents often start from a self-creation view on authenticity, which argues

for a dynamic self that can be shaped through choices and actions. One can deliberately choose to become who you really want to be. These projects of self-creation are nearly limitless, at least from a moral point of view, as long as one remains autonomous and honest in choice. The autonomy model described was multi-tier, demanding authentic life choices for true autonomy. This more liberal approach leaves the choice to enhance up to the individual. However, the proponents of enhancement technologies are also faced with challenges. DeGrazia introduced the condition 'frivolous reasons' as a condition not to enhance. Such a claim needs an objective standard which his theory does not allow for. So it appears neither side of the debate is without challenge.

In the fourth chapter we took a step back to see what both sides are actually talking about when using the concept of authenticity. It appeared that both opponents and proponents appealed to the concept as defined by Charles Taylor, who defined authenticity as a moral ideal. Authenticity to Taylor is thus a view of what a higher life should look like. Then, we took a look at the work of Erik Parens, who argued that both sides are more aimed at refuting their opponents' arguments rather than understanding that both claims could hold valuable statements to the debate. He added that any of us can feel at home in both sides, which he called frameworks. Through examples he showed that we sometimes operate from the gratitude framework, and sometimes we operate from the creativity framework. To deny that the other side is better equipped for certain hard cases would be missing the point of the debate. It was thus concluded that if we want to progress through the debate, understanding of opposing positions is essential. It has been discussed that in the end, there are three concepts of authenticity. All of which can be useful to the debate. One if more suited for the universal level, one for individual decision making, and one for debate in the doctor's office.

The concept of authenticity cannot be deemed useless, as long as it is clear what is meant when the term is used. Both sides to the enhancement debate should recognize the limitations of their theory in certain cases in order to truly progress. Sharply defining the concept can help its clarity and its usefulness even more.

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