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24.06J / STS.006J Bioethics
Spring 2009

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Enhancing of Cheating

Session L17

Carl Elliott, Selections from *Better Than Well: American Medicine Meets the American Dream* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), pp. xv-xxi, 28-34, 50-53, 119-128.

Michael J. Sandel, "Bionic Athletes," in *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 25-43.

Julie Deardorff, "Revving Up the Brain," *Tribune* (7 March 2004): online edition.

Elliott, *Better than Well*: Elliott, a philosopher and pediatrician, reviews the range of enhancement drugs and technologies, from Serentil and Miltown in the 1950s and 1960s, to Prozac, Viagra, Botox, and cosmetic surgery today. Is it possible to make a rigorous distinction between treatment and enhancement? For instance, is immunization treatment or enhancement? In the introduction, Elliott muses about the ways we find significance in life through self-fulfillment and authenticity. What is authenticity, and how can you know if you are being true to yourself? Does Prozac enhance or undermine authenticity? Elliott shows that none of these assessments are static over time. How was cosmetic surgery transformed from an indulgence of vanity in the early 20th century into a credible medical concern today? How did pharmaceutical companies convert a series of personality traits into diagnosable and treatable mental disorders? Does all of this contribute to our psychological well being and, as a result, help us pursue the valuable goal of self-fulfillment? Does it do something else instead? Keep an eye open for slippery slopes as you read these chapters.

Sandel, "Bionic Athletes": Sandel, a philosopher at Harvard, explores our intuitions about a basic question. Suppose two baseball players each hit 70 home runs in a season. One did it naturally, one used steroids. What, precisely, is the difference between their achievements? Does achievement need to be earned, in a way that is undermined by enhancement? Citing a series of examples, he shows how difficult it can be to draw clear distinctions. Do runners cheat by wearing running shoes? By injecting EPO? By training in Nike's Altitude House? What about Tiger Woods, who had vision correct surgery? Sandel argues in the end that a distinction can be made by enhancements that allow true athleticism to show through and those that corrupt it. Are you convinced by this solution? Can you make the distinctions in every case?

Deardorff, "Revving Up the Brain": Deardorff, a journalist with the *Chicago Tribune* explores the dilemma of Ritalin. Intended for use as a treatment for people with ADHD, it has increasingly been diverted for use as a cognitive enhancer in people without a diagnosis. This certainly happens at MIT, though it is hard to know how common it is. Is this any different from using caffeine? From doing crossword puzzles to stay sharp? What would be the downsides, if any, to universal use of Ritalin and other amphetamines to improve performance at work or school? In Sandel's terms, does Ritalin honor or undermine the integrity of the sport of academics?