

ANTIDEPRESSANTS, BIOENHANCEMENTS, AND THE ETHICS OF SELF-RESPECT

by

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Submitted to the Department of Linguistics and Philosophy on August 18, 2009 in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

ABSTRACT

Antidepressants and bioenhancement technologies raise special concerns – both for those who use them and those who don’t – about who we are and how we should treat ourselves. In this dissertation, I confront these concerns by asking and answering two ethical questions about different forms of self-treatment. These are: 1. Is antidepressant use morally problematic insofar as it is self-objectifying?, and 2. Is bioenhancement use morally problematic insofar as it undermines self-respect? (Note: by “morally problematic,” I mean “possessing a wrong-making feature,” not “always wrong, all things considered.”)

The first two chapters focus on the former question – the question of whether antidepressant use is morally problematic insofar as it is self-objectifying. In order to answer this, I first step back, in Chapter 1, and look at the phenomenon of self-objectification generally construed. I draw from Martha Nussbaum’s and Rae Langton’s work on objectification to formulate my own definition of “self-objectification.” I then argue that self-objectification is indeed possible, and that it assumes a number of interesting forms.

The second chapter turns to the specific bioethical question of whether antidepressant use is morally problematic insofar as it is self-objectifying. I argue that the answer is “yes.” Although I’m not the first to voice this particular objection to antidepressant use, I extend this previous scholarship in two principal ways. First, I draw from my definition and analysis of self-objectification in Chapter 1 to characterize exactly how antidepressant use is self-objectifying, and to pinpoint the accompanying specific moral offense. Second, I argue in detail against Neil Levy’s contention that some cases of self-objectification with antidepressants are completely permissible.

In my third and final chapter, I turn to the second question: whether bioenhancement use is morally problematic insofar as it undermines self-respect. I argue that it is, while also acknowledging that there are other senses in which it, simultaneously, can *promote* self-respect. I offer a few options for conceptualizing this tension, and maintain that the undermining of self-respect nevertheless constitutes one reason to worry about bioenhancement technologies.

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