

## ARE MEMORY MODIFICATION TECHNOLOGIES INCOMPATIBLE WITH AN AUTHENTIC LIFE?

Human enhancement technologies (e.g. designed to improve cognition or mood) are sometimes criticized on the grounds that they might lead to an inauthentic life. One example that raises this worry in a particularly acute manner are memory modification technologies (MMTs). The members of the American President's Council on Bioethics, for instance, in their 2003 report *Beyond Therapy*, have suggested that MMTs might threaten our "identity" (whatever that might mean exactly), which in their case seems plausibly understood as a concern about authenticity. In this paper I discuss whether such a concern is justified, and if so, to what extent.

I begin by explaining my understanding of authenticity, and its contrary (as well as the idea of an authentic life). I define authenticity as the quality of being faithful to one's true self, when doing so is worthy of praise. As for the notion of a "true self", I use it to refer to features that I take to be central to a person's identity, such as her personality traits, likes and dislikes, personal commitments, or significant past experiences. I also say a bit about what being faithful to such a true self means exactly (sometimes, manifesting some particular trait rather than hiding it; etc.).

In section 3 of the paper I distinguish between memory *enhancement*, and memory *editing* (e.g. erasing memories or blunting their emotional impact). I give a brief overview of the technologies we can currently use, and those we can expect to become available in the near future, to engage in these two forms of memory modification. In section 4, I argue that both procedures can work either way as far as authenticity is concerned, thus justifying a negative answer to the title question: in some cases, they might lead to inauthenticity, yet in others they might actually help us live a more authentic life. An example of the former kind, in relation to memory enhancement, would be someone who found that her improved memory made her unable to forget trivial offenses done to her that she wanted to forget, and thus unable to be as forgiving as she wanted to be. An example of the latter kind would be someone who improved her learning capacity thanks to memory enhancement and thereby became better able to express her commitment to self-cultivation.

In the latter part of section 4, I criticize some of the arguments presented in *Beyond Therapy*, while acknowledging that its authors are on to something on one particular point – also raised by Matthew Liao and Anders Sandberg in a recent paper, under the heading "The Issue of Appropriate Moral Reaction". I argue that this point is best put as a concern about authenticity: as authors like Martha Nussbaum and John Skorupski have suggested, at least some of our moods and attitudes admit of *reasons*. When used in certain ways, memory editing might disconnect us from the reasons we have to respond in certain ways to our past experiences, leading to an inauthentic life: e.g. someone might, in order to enhance her own well-being, edit her memory in a way that made her forgive some past offense too easily (by her own standards, which I argue are decisive for determining her reasons to feel and react, at least provided that they are *reasonable* standards). I claim that this problem does not merely have to do with the possible consequences of memory editing: there is intrinsic value in having accurate memories and in living a life based on such memories.