

Book Review: The Medicalization of Cyberspace

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BOOK REVIEWS:

The Medicalization of Cyberspace

Andy Miah and Emma Rich

ROUTLEDGE, 2008, PP. 160 + XV, HARD BACK, ISBN 10: 0-415-37622-X, £70,
PAPER BACK, ISBN 10: 0-415-39364-7, £21.99.

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For anyone who wants to explore the question of whether digital technology poses particular novel ethical problems, in relation, say, to human reproduction and genetic enhancement, this book is invaluable. It does not pretend to solve the problems or answer the questions raised but it is a solid basis for further study and deliberation.

The general field of enquiry is the relationship between bioethics, medical sociology and the social and cultural outcomes of what one might call the technological changes associated with computers and the internet. Various topics, questions and issues are raised, sometimes with tantalising brevity. Nonetheless, one's appetite is wetted. For instance, there are discussions of 'partial prostitution' and the commercialisation of body parts; posthumanism; the nature of human and artificial bodies; cyborgs; human identity; reproductive rights; genes and clones; pro- Anorexia communities, discourses and identity; virtual communities in relation to health and health care; the nature and significance of on-line medical experts, expertise and information; feminism and cyberspace.

The approach taken is refreshingly open-minded. In their view, medicalization as such is not inherently wrong. They write: '... posthuman rhetorics should be constructed as morally complex but not immoral... we challenge the concern that biomedicalisation needs to be construed as a dehumanising process'. (p.15) They do not predict a utopia but neither are they gloomy or pessimistic.

This short, well written, book covers a great deal of ground. The views expressed are discerning and balanced. The afterword about the death of one of the authors is moving, dignified and perceptive. It is a poignant and fitting reflective ending to a thoughtful and thought-provoking book.