

Bioethics Book Club



The Brill Pill

*A Novel by Akemy C. Brodsky
She Writes Press, 2023.*

Summary¹

In the not-so-distant future, the highly ambitious scientist, William Dalal, is working on improving lives of people using brain regeneration. However, personal tragedy and a rivalry between Will and another scientist causes Will to lose his moral compass. Driven by his ambition to help people become smarter and more successful, Will decides to take matters in his own hands and carry out his research experiments in unconventional ways. For every success, however, there is a consequence, and Will starts to question whether it is all worth it.

Ethical Issues:

Research integrity	‘Playing God’
Research on human research subjects	Dehumanization
Respect for persons	Genetic Modification
Consent	Natural/Unnatural

Discussion questions:

- Why do you think Will made the decision to collaborate with Arthur?
- Will’s effort to enhance the cognitive capacity of his research subjects focuses particularly on making them more intelligent than average human beings. Why do you think that is?
- Do you think Will is ‘playing God?’ with peoples’ lives? Why or why not?
- From an ethics lens, which of Will’s actions as a researcher do you find most problematic? Why?

¹ Adapted from publisher’s summary.

- Does the fact that people's brains are altered artificially make them 'unnatural' human beings? Why or why not?
- Toward the end, Will weighs his actions and their consequences in terms of pros and cons. In your opinion, what are the pros and cons of Will's work? What are the consequences of Will's decisions?

Discuss the following passages from the book:

P. 98: "It doesn't seem right to make decisions about how someone else have to live their life. Like, my friend's grandmother, that wasn't what she wanted. But she was old, and they declared her unfit to make her own decisions, so what could she do? If Arthur really is devising what we think, an injection that can modify the way the brain develops, he would be completely altering the entire lives of these children without their consent."

P. 99. "You think that giving someone an advantage is taking away their freedom? No one gets to decide whether or not to be born, and that has to be the biggest decision of all."

P. 99. "I don't see why everyone seems to think being clever is an advantage."

P.298. "What happened to you?" He asked her point-blank, brushing his temple, mirroring the spot where she hid her scar. "Is this who you really are?" It sounded unbearably clichéd, but for once, Will thought, it was totally appropriate. She knew it, and he knew it. She hadn't been born like this. *She wasn't natural.*"