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Engendering Moral Post-persons: A Novel Self-help Strategy

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Humans are morally deficient in a variety of ways. Some of these deficiencies threaten the continued existence of our species. For example, we appear to be incapable of responding to climate change in ways that are likely to prevent the consequent suffering. Some people are morally better than others, but we could all be better. The price of not becoming morally better is that when those events that threaten us occur, we will suffer from them. If we can prevent this suffering from occurring, then we ought to do so. That we ought to make ourselves morally better in order to prevent very bad things from happening justifies, according to some, the development and administration of moral enhancement. I address in this paper the idea that moral enhancement could give rise to moral transhumans, or moral post-persons. Contrary to recent arguments that we shouldn't engender moral post-persons, I argue that we should. Roughly, the reasons for this conclusion are that we can expect moral post-persons to resemble the morally best of us, our moral exemplars. Since moral exemplars promote their interests by promoting the interests of others (or they promote others' interests at the expense of their own) we can expect moral post-persons to pursue our interests. Since we should also pursue our own interests, we should bring about moral post-persons.

Keywords: Moral enhancement; transhumanism; moral status; climate change

Humans are morally deficient in a variety of ways. Some of these deficiencies threaten the continued existence of our species. We are quite poor at coordinating among large groups of people actions that prevent distant, abstract events that, if they were to occur, undermine the achievement of our individual and collective interests. For example, we appear to be incapable of responding to climate change in ways that make likely the prevention of suffering that will result. Perhaps we have the wrong moral beliefs about what behavior is appropriate, or perhaps we have the appropriate moral beliefs but fail to be motivated by them. It's possible that our deficiencies are not moral deficiencies so much as they are cognitive deficiencies: we may not be smart enough to figure out how to coordinate the prevention of climate change or the proliferation of weapons or whatever else threatens our existence. Some people are morally better than others, but we could all be better. The price of not becoming morally better is that when those events that threaten us occur, we will suffer from them. If we can prevent this suffering from occurring, then we ought to do so.

That we ought to make ourselves morally better in order to prevent very bad things from happening justifies, according to some, the development and administration of moral enhancement.¹ Moral enhancement is the enhancement of our moral capacities—our moral beliefs, evidence, motivations, dispositions, emotions, wills, or some combination of these that result in improved moral behavior. To say that a person's moral capacities have been enhanced relies on a conceptual distinction between treatments and enhancement, and there may be no

¹ Persson, I., & Savulescu, J. (2008). The Perils of Cognitive Enhancement and the Urgent Imperative to Enhance the Moral Character of Humanity. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 25(3), 162–177. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5930.2008.00410.x>; Persson, I., & Savulescu, J. (2014). *Unfit for the Future: The Need for Moral Enhancement*. Oxford University Press.

actual distinction. But the idea is clear enough; moral enhancement improves upon a person's moral capacities.

The scholarly body of work on moral enhancement is large and growing. I address in this paper an idea that has emerged from this body of work, the idea that moral enhancement could give rise to moral transhumans, or moral post-persons. Some have argued that moral enhancement ought to be compulsory.² The argument for compulsory moral enhancement is that it is necessary to prevent the “ultimate harm” that is likely to ensue from catastrophic climate change, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or, more generally, the fact that a greater number of people have access to a greater number of methods to kill us all, or at least to make life for us so miserable that it may not be worth living. Since widespread moral enhancement is necessary to prevent this from happening, and we ought to prevent this from happening, moral enhancement ought to be compulsory. It is a further question whether compulsory moral enhancement can be morally justified³ or effective at preventing “ultimate harm.”⁴

However, if we are to engage in widespread moral enhancement, such as it would be if it were compulsory, we can expect moral post-persons, or people who are so morally superior to us that they cannot be properly considered human persons. To get moral post-persons from moral enhancement, the enhancement need not be compulsory. I have argued elsewhere that moral enhancement can so disrupt a person's psychology that it changes their personal identity.⁵ If

² Ibid

³ Crutchfield, P. (2019). Compulsory moral bioenhancement should be covert. *Bioethics*, 33(1), 112–121. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bioe.12496>

⁴ Crutchfield, P. (2016). The Epistemology of Moral Bioenhancement. *Bioethics*, 30(6). <https://doi.org/10.1111/bioe.12239>

⁵ Crutchfield, P. (2018). Moral enhancement can kill. *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 43(5), 568–584. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jmp/jhy020> Recent evidence suggests that laypeople believe that the traits that constitute personal identity are moral traits (Strohming, N., & Nichols, S. (2014). The essential moral self. *Cognition*, 131(1), 159–171.

moral enhancement can so disrupt, it is only a step further to think that it can change their moral status. But this paper isn't about that step. It's about the post-persons that result. Such post-persons, being morally superior, are likely to have opportunities to sacrifice us in pursuit of their own interests like we sacrifice some animals to pursue our interests.⁶ Thus, goes the argument, we ought not bring about these post-persons, because doing so conflicts with our interests. The implication is that we also ought not administer moral enhancement widely.

I argue below that we ought to bring about moral post-persons. Roughly, the reasons for this conclusion are that we can expect moral post-persons to resemble the morally best of us, our moral exemplars. Since moral exemplars promote others' interests prior to their own, we can expect moral post-persons to pursue our interests. Since we should also pursue our own interests, we should bring about moral post-persons.

In the next section I introduce Nicholas Agar's concern that we should not engender moral post-persons.⁷ In the subsequent section I draw on Linda Zagzebski's recent claim that moral exemplars ground reference to moral terms.⁸ I argue that we can expect moral post-persons to resemble moral exemplars. I continue by arguing that since we can expect moral post-persons to resemble moral exemplars, we should bring them about, contrary to Agar's claim that we shouldn't.

AGAR ON MORAL POST-PERSONS

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2013.12.005>). I argue that if this is true, moral enhancement may kill those to whom the enhancement is administered.

⁶ Agar, N. (2013). Why is it possible to enhance moral status and why doing so is wrong? *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 39(2), 67–74. <https://doi.org/10.1136/medethics-2012-100597>

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Zagzebski, L. (2017). *Exemplarist Moral Theory*. Oxford University Press.

If moral enhancement can engender moral post-persons, then moral enhancement can elevate the moral status of the enhanced. This conditional is true by virtue of the meaning of ‘moral post-person,’ that they are by definition beings with a higher moral status. If moral enhancement couldn’t elevate the moral status of the enhanced, then the enhanced wouldn’t be moral post-persons, but mere persons. Some believe that moral post-persons are not possible (which still doesn’t imply that the conditional beginning this paragraph is false). Buchanan has argued that moral status is a threshold concept, and that there’s no moral status higher than that which meets the threshold; there’s no moral status higher than personhood, supposing that personhood meets the threshold.⁹ He uses this concept of moral status to mitigate worries about moral post-persons: there’s no need to worry about moral post-persons, because they aren’t possible, given the nature of moral status.

While it might be that there is a threshold that persons meet but other beings fail to meet, and that whether a being is on one side of the threshold or the other determines their moral status, it is possible that there are further thresholds that mere persons would fail to meet but that the enhanced would meet. That thresholds determine moral status doesn’t imply that there is only one threshold.¹⁰ In any case, so long as moral post-persons aren’t impossible, then for the present purpose it doesn’t much matter what properties of a being confer upon it moral status. If moral enhancement, whatever the etiology, can result in beings with moral capacities so improved over those of mere persons that they have a higher moral status, then we should engender these moral

⁹ Buchanan, A. (2009). Moral Status and Human Enhancement. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 37(4), 346–381. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1088-4963.2009.01166.x>

¹⁰ DeGrazia, D. (2012). Genetic enhancement, post-persons and moral status: A reply to Buchanan. *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 38(3), 135–139. <https://doi.org/10.1136/medethics-2011-100126>

post-persons.¹¹ For the present purposes it doesn't matter what specific account grounds the truth of the antecedent of the above conditional. As long as moral post-persons are possible, then my argument gets off the ground. Even if they aren't possible, that would only mean that the antecedent of the above conditional false, which in no way undermines my argument.

My concern is rather with the expected behavior of moral post-persons. Nicholas Agar argues that cognitive enhancement is likely to result in moral post-persons and that we should not engender moral post-persons. I agree with Agar that cognitive enhancement is likely to result in moral post-persons and readily accept his argument for this point (though there are other potential methods of moral enhancement). But I think we should engender such beings.

Agar's argument that we should not engender moral post-persons begins by noting that there are morally permissible circumstances in which the interests of beings with moral status can be sacrificed. Following McMahan,¹² he identifies one set of these circumstances as supreme emergencies: in some cases of emergency, it is permissible to sacrifice some persons for the sake of others. Sending two trained engineers into a malfunctioning nuclear reactor may sacrifice their interests, but it is for the sake of the interests of many others. The sacrifice of interests is to prevent significant harm.

But Agar finds other circumstances in which it is permissible to sacrifice a being's interests, such as opportunities to benefit. Whereas supreme emergencies may permit the sacrifice of a being's interests to prevent harm, supreme opportunities may permit the sacrifice of a being's interests to secure a benefit. However, supreme emergencies permit the sacrifice of

¹¹ Rakic, V. (2015). How Moral Is (Moral) Enhancement? We Must Create Beings with Moral Standing Superior to Our Own. *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics*, 24, 58–65. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0963180114000309>

¹² McMahan, J. (2009). Cognitive Disability and Cognitive Enhancement. *Metaphilosophy*, 40(3–4), 582–605. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9973.2009.01612.x>

persons of full moral status—it is permissible to sacrifice nuclear engineers to prevent harm. Agar doesn't think it is permissible to sacrifice persons for the sake of securing a benefit. For example, we don't allow researchers to sacrifice human subjects to secure a benefit, even if the benefits are the curing of disease. Though it may not be permissible to sacrifice persons to secure a benefit, many people believe it is permissible to sacrifice the interests of non-persons.¹³ We routinely sacrifice the interests of non-human primates to attempt to secure a benefit. Thus, there is asymmetry in the permissibility of sacrifice in emergencies and sacrifice to secure benefit. Persons can be sacrificed to prevent harm, but not secure a benefit. Non-persons can be sacrificed to prevent harm and to secure a benefit, or so Agar's argument goes.

Agar thinks the source of this asymmetry is the ranking of moral status. Relative to other beings, persons have the highest moral status and this prevents their sacrifice for benefit. Sacrificing the interests of non-persons who may nevertheless have moral status is permissible, however, because their moral status is lower than that of persons. It is this relational property of having the highest moral status that permits moral post-persons to sacrifice mere persons to secure a benefit for themselves. Agar writes that “the act of creating post-persons would, in itself, dislodge mere persons from the role of having the highest moral status. Their demotion would render them eligible for sacrifice to provide significant benefits for post-persons.”¹⁴

If Agar is right that moral post-persons may permissibly sacrifice the interests of mere persons to secure their own benefit, it doesn't follow that we ought not engender them. It must also be the case that we could expect such a sacrifice. If it's merely permissible, the conclusion

¹³ It may not be permissible to sacrifice the interests of non-humans for the benefit of humans. The point is not to dispute this point, but that Agar's argument that we shouldn't engender moral post-persons requires that it is permissible to sacrifice the interests of non-humans to secure a benefit for ourselves.

¹⁴ Zagzebski *op. cit.* note 6, p. 72

that we ought not engender them follows only if we can expect moral post-persons to sacrifice mere persons.

Agar thinks that we can expect moral post-persons to sacrifice mere persons for their own benefits. His primary reason for this claim is that mere persons will provide good research models from which moral post-persons could extrapolate, potentially curing diseases that afflict them. Mere persons currently do the same thing, except the models we use are those of non-human primates or other mammals, who we subject to highly invasive research methods in order to secure benefit for ourselves. Moral post-persons would do the same, according to Agar. Supposing further that the moral enhancement results from cognitive enhancement, Agar cautions that we shouldn't expect much insight into what moral post-persons would do to secure their own benefits and how mere persons fit into those plans.

Agar concludes that it is permissible for moral post-persons to sacrifice mere persons to secure benefits for themselves, that this sacrifice is likely, and that we ought not engender them. Implicit in this argument is that moral post-persons *would* benefit from sacrificing the interests of mere persons. He assumes that the interests of moral post-persons would be in conflict with those of mere persons. In what follows I challenge this assumption—I don't think the interests of moral post-persons would conflict with those of mere persons at all, but even if they do it doesn't matter. Moral post-persons promote first the interests of others', even if promoting others' interests is at the expense of their own interests. That's what makes them moral post-persons!

MORAL EXEMPLARS

The moral capacities of moral post-persons are greater than those of mere persons. Whatever behaviors constitute morally right action, moral post-persons do those more than mere persons. There are some very good mere persons. If moral post-persons' moral capacities are so much greater than those of mere persons that they have a different moral status, then such people should be at least as good as those mere persons who are the best of mere persons. Whatever psychological or behavioral properties make the best of us so good, moral post-persons will bear those properties to a greater degree. The best of us mere persons—our moral exemplars—provide at least a glimpse of what we could expect out of moral post-persons.

When we look at our moral exemplars, we find that they have a great capacity to behave in ways that promote others' interests. Linda Zagzebski develops an account of moral exemplars. She writes that exemplars “are those persons whom we see, on close observation and with reflection, to be admirable in all or most of their acquired traits.”¹⁵ Reflective admiration, directing the emotion of admiration toward a person's trait or traits after subjecting it to scrutiny, is the test of exemplarity.¹⁶ Moral exemplars are those people whose moral traits are, after reflection, admirable.

Reflective admiration grounds exemplarity, and Zagzebski identifies the properties that we admire.¹⁷ First, she claims, we admire the psychological sources of the admired behavior rather than the external causes that bypass agency. Second, of the psychological properties we admire, we admire acquired properties more so than properties acquired through natural temperament. Third, Zagzebski writes that “Within the category of acquired psychological features that are the sources of acts we admire, we admire motives of concern for others more

¹⁵ Ibid: 65

¹⁶ Ibid: 63

¹⁷ Ibid: 64

than motives of self-interest.”¹⁸ Reflective admiration is the test of exemplarity, and what we reflectively admire is the acquired concern for others that leads to the admired behavior. Thus, our moral exemplars are those persons who behave in ways that promote others’ interests and do so because of an acquired concern for them.

Zagzebski offers some examples of moral exemplars. Leopold Socha was a Polish sewer inspector who helped Jews escape Nazis liquidating their Polish ghetto in May of 1943. While those in their community were rounded up and shot, some Jews escaped to the sewers of Lvov. There, Socha aided them in their survival. He risked his own life to bring them food, medicine, games, prayer books, candles for Sabbath light, and information about the outside world until they could escape in July of 1944. When they did escape, Socha had arranged furnished living quarters for the families. Socha, a former thief, was initially paid but quickly took it as his mission to save them. He was killed in 1946 when saving his daughter from a Russian army truck.

Socha seems to pass the test of exemplarity. He acquired the motivation to promote others’ interests at the expense of his own (or, alternatively, his interests were indexed to the promotion of theirs). He could have personally profited from taking the Jews’ money and turning them in, claiming further reward for their capture. He also could have simply refused to risk his own life to save others. That he didn’t do so is admirable, and that admiration stands up to scrutiny. Further research on other Holocaust rescuers like Socha indicates that some rescuers felt a connection with the Jews, while others felt a sense of responsibility for the welfare of society.

Zagzebski’s second example of exemplars is Jean Vanier and the L’Arche communities he founded. Vanier was a philosophy professor who, over an extended period of training in the

¹⁸ Ibid: 64

academy and the ministry, developed a calling to improve the lives of those with mental disabilities. At first, he invited two men with disabilities to live with him. He assisted them in all aspects of their lives, living together as family. Over time, more and more communities were developed. In the communities, volunteers live as families with the disabled, promoting their members' interests. They assist in their day-to-day lives, striving to help those rejected by society attain independence. The volunteers report to be motivated by factors similar to those of Holocaust rescuers, such as factors relating to the closeness to and the welfare of others. Also like Socha, Vanier and the volunteers in L'Arche communities seem to pass the test of exemplarity.

Zagzebski uses reflective admiration and moral exemplars to ground a comprehensive moral theory. She makes an interesting and compelling case that properties like *goodness* and *rightness* are grounded in the emotion of admiration toward exemplars. But I don't defend her account. That doesn't mean that what she says about moral exemplars is wrong. It seems right that Leopold Socha and the Holocaust rescuers and Jean Vanier and the L'Arche communities are moral exemplars. They *are* admirable, and it seems right that they are the morally best of mere persons. If these are moral exemplars, the best of mere persons, we can expect moral post-persons to be at least as good. What sets moral exemplars apart from the rest of mere persons is their admirable behavior that emerges from their concern for others. Thus, if this is what makes moral exemplars moral exemplars, and moral post-persons are at least as good, then we should expect that moral post-persons' are at least as concerned for others' interests and behave accordingly.

Zagzebski holds that moral exemplars are motivated to act by concern for others. There are two ways we might view the relation between exemplars' interests and the interests of others. The most intuitive relation is that the weight of others' interests is greater than the weight of

exemplars' own interests. Thus, when others' interests conflict with the exemplars' own interests, because they are more heavily weighted, the exemplars will first promote others' interests. This seems the most natural way of viewing Socha and Vanier and other exemplars, and I will assume in what follows that exemplars, and so moral post-persons, weight others' interests such that when they conflict they first promote others' interests.

The second way that exemplars' interests could be related to others' interests is that others' interests partly constitute exemplars' interests. Because others' interests partly constitute exemplars' interests, there is no possible conflict between others' interests and exemplars' interests. This seems less intuitive, in part because it seems like Socha and Vanier did not do what they did to promote their own interests, but rather to promote others' interests at the expense of their own. Further, if exemplars' interests were partly constituted by others' interests, for any given act that promotes others' interests, it would be difficult to say whether was motivated by promotion of self-interests or the promotion of others' interest. And if it's not possible to rule out the possibility that the act is motivated by self-interest, then it is difficult to see how that act could be reflectively admired, which indicates that it may not be possible to say of a person that they are exemplary. This is to say that this second way of viewing the relation between moral exemplars' interests and the interests of others is not only counterintuitive, but also not obviously compatible with the idea that exemplars are reflectively admirable.

So, it seems the best way to think of the relation between moral exemplars' interests and the interests of others is that others' interests are weighted more heavily than, or in some sense prior to, moral exemplars' own interests. Moral exemplars are people who promote others' interests prior to their own, when others' interests conflict with their own interests. It doesn't

follow from this relation, however, that exemplars can't derive well being from the promotion of others' interests.¹⁹ They can, and probably do.

That exemplars, and so moral post-persons, are people who promote others' interests prior to their own, even if doing so undermines their own interests, has important implications for Agar's argument. He argues that we shouldn't engender moral post-persons because they will take advantage of opportunities to secure a benefit for themselves by sacrificing mere persons. Sacrificing mere persons is presumably not in the interests of mere persons. The moral post-persons' opportunities to secure a benefit for themselves therefore comes at the expense of the interests of mere persons. Agar's conclusion relies on the false assumption that the interests of moral post-persons and the interests of mere persons conflict, and that when they conflict moral post-persons will be more strongly motivated to promote their own interests. But if moral post-persons are at least as good as moral exemplars, and what makes moral exemplars good is that they promote others' interests prior to their own, then we should expect moral post-persons to forego opportunities to secure themselves a benefit and instead promote mere persons' interests.²⁰ Moral post-persons are more likely to sacrifice their own interests to promote others' interests than they are to sacrifice others' interests to promote their own; if they weren't, then they wouldn't be better than moral exemplars, and wouldn't be moral post-persons.

WE SHOULD ENGENDER MORAL POST-PERSONS

¹⁹ An anonymous referee offered this point, which I now adopt.

²⁰ This argument is sound even if the relation between moral exemplars' interests and mere persons' interests is that the latter partly constitute the former. If that were the case, moral post-persons would not act in ways that undermine mere persons' interests, such as by using them as research subjects or otherwise exploiting them for their own gain, because to do so would be to undermine their own interests as well.

I have argued that moral post-persons can be expected to promote mere persons' interests, even at the expense of their own interests. Because Agar's argument relies on the premise that they won't, there is good reason to doubt Agar's argument that we shouldn't engender moral post-persons.

That we should engender moral post-persons rests on some further claims. One is Singer's principle: if we can prevent something bad from happening without sacrificing something of comparable moral significance, we ought to do so.²¹ Moral post-persons will be in a better position to prevent the catastrophic effects of climate change, amok AI, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, especially if their enhanced moral capacities are acquired by way of cognitive enhancement. Moral post-persons will be to mere persons and climate change as Leopold Socha was to the Jews in the sewers and the Nazis. Because they are moral post-persons, they will be motivated to save mere persons, if they can, even if doing so is at the expense of their own interests. If mere persons have interests in saving themselves from climate change or terrorism or bad-acting executives, then they should engender moral post-persons, because moral post-persons will be better able to promote that interest. They are in a better position to save than are mere persons.

Singer's proposed obligation to prevent bad things from happening is conditional on not having to sacrifice anything of comparable moral significance. Much of the resistance to moral enhancement, especially widespread moral enhancement, is because some believe that enhancing moral capacities *does* sacrifice something of comparable moral significance, namely freedom.²² I'm skeptical of the general claim that moral enhancement undermines freedom and even more

²¹ Singer, P. (1972). Famine, Affluence, and Morality. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 1(3), 229–243.

²² Harris, J. (2011). Moral Enhancement and Freedom. *Bioethics*, 25(2), 102–111. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8519.2010.01854.x>

skeptical that if it undermines freedom it is of comparable moral significance to the prevention of the suffering that is likely to result from climate change.²³

But the idea that moral enhancement could undermine freedom also doesn't undermine the argument that we should engender moral post-persons.²⁴ Consider the motivations of moral exemplars. Zagzebski quotes Socha, upon encountering the Jews in the sewer, as recalling, "When I squeezed through the shaft, into the little cellar, you were sitting there with Kryisia and Pawel under each arm. Like a mother kite and her chicks. It was at that moment, when you were sitting there with the children, at that moment I *decided* to save you."²⁵ Socha decided to save the Jews; he was not compelled to. Suppose that moral enhancement would engender moral post-persons who can't so decide. Instead they are compelled to save. First, it's not clear that this compulsion would undermine freedom. Second, even if the compulsion does undermine freedom, it's not clear that it being undermined is of comparable moral significance. Which is better: Socha seeing Kryisia and Pawel and their mother and *deciding to not save them*, or being compelled to save them? Similarly, which is better: moral post-persons having the freedom to not save mere persons and deciding to not save them, or moral post-persons being compelled to save? If potentially undermining freedom sacrifices something of moral significance comparable to saving the Jews in the sewer or mere persons from climate change, then it should be a difficult to determine which is better. But it seems obvious that it is better for Socha and moral post-

²³ See DeGrazia, D. (2014). Moral enhancement, freedom, and what we (should) value in moral behaviour. *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 40(6), 361–368. <https://doi.org/10.1136/medethics-2012-101157> for an argument that moral enhancement doesn't undermine freedom and even if it does it is not so valuable to defeat the permissibility of moral enhancement.

²⁴ For discussion of Harris' worry about freedom and some replies to it, see Persson, I., & Savulescu, J. (2013). Getting moral enhancement right: The desirability of moral bioenhancement. *Bioethics*, 27(3), 124–131. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8519.2011.01907.x>; Savulescu, J., & Persson, I. (2012). Moral Enhancement, Freedom and the God Machine. *The Monist*, 95(3); Douglas, T. (2013). Moral enhancement via direct emotion modulation: A reply to John Harris. *Bioethics*, 27(3), 160–168. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8519.2011.01919.x>

²⁵ Zagzebski, op. cit. note 8, p. 71, emphasis mine.

persons to save than it is for them to have the freedom to not and then not save. Of course, I'm a mere person and morally deficient in a variety of ways, some of which include the reliability of my moral intuitions. Third, to determine whether sacrificing freedom is better than allowing to suffer, we should ask moral post-persons. After all, it's irrelevant whether moral post-persons' freedom is of great moral significance to mere persons, since mere persons, not being enhanced, wouldn't be sacrificing their own freedom. Moral post-persons would be sacrificing it, and they may find that their own interests in retaining freedom pale in comparison to the interests of others.

We should engender moral post-persons because they are more likely to be in a position to save mere persons from very bad things. However, moral post-persons are motivated by promoting others' interests, and saving others from very bad things doesn't exhaust all the ways in which their interests are promoted. Positioning others to flourish also promotes their interests. Consider the other of Zagzebski's moral exemplars, the members of the L'Arche communities. While it is clear that Socha and the Holocaust rescuers promote others' interests by saving them, it is less clear that members of the L'Arche communities promote others' interest by saving them. Instead, they appear to promote others' interests by positioning them to flourish. In the opening paragraph to his book, Jean Vanier writes:

This book is about the liberation of the human heart from the tentacles of chaos and loneliness, and from those fears that provoke us to exclude and reject others. It is a liberation that opens us up and leads us to the discovery of our common humanity...The discovery of our common humanity liberates us from self-centered compulsions and inner hurts; it is the discovery that ultimately finds its fulfillment in the forgiveness and in loving those who are our enemies. It is the process of truly becoming human.²⁶

²⁶ Vanier, J. (1998). *Becoming Human*. Paulist Press. p. 5

While ‘liberation’ may connote saving someone from something, it’s hard to read this passage and not think that Vanier was trying to make his members (and volunteers) the best that they can be. Vanier and the volunteers of L’Arche communities position those with mental disabilities to flourish by giving them the environment and care that allows their “transformation.”

Maybe there’s no moral difference between promoting a person’s interest by saving them and promoting a person’s interest by positioning them to flourish. But if there is, then we can expect moral post-persons to promote our interests both ways, just like exemplary mere persons do. This could take the form of providing the environment and care that we need to flourish, like it does at the L’Arche communities. The lives of many mere persons are very good (many more are very poor), but almost all of them could be better. They could be better if we weren’t systematically biased against disconfirming evidence or members of other groups. They could be better if we didn’t have to worry so much about where the next meal is going to come from, when the resources are available for every mere person to eat. They could be better if we didn’t behave in ways that make probable suffering from chronic disease. They could be better if we made better decisions, including decisions regarding the political systems we live in and how resources are distributed. Moral post-persons, like moral exemplars, can be expected to go beyond preventing bad things from happening. We can also expect them to intervene in ways that promote our flourishing.

Whatever moral post-persons’ proposed interventions, mere persons can promote their own interests by relying on the moral behavior of moral post-persons. Engendering moral post-persons doesn’t imply that mere persons can’t still work as they otherwise would to promote their own interests. Whatever we are doing now to promote our interests, we can continue (moral post-persons may intervene if mere persons believe they are promoting their own interests but in

fact are undermining them). As far as the interests of mere persons go, there's no downside to engendering moral post-persons, unless Agar is right that (a) the interests of moral post-persons conflict with the interests of mere persons and (b) when they do conflict moral post-persons promote their own interests at the expense of mere persons' interests. Since moral post-persons can be expected to be better than morally exemplary mere persons, and moral exemplars promote others' interests at the expense of their own, we have good reason to believe that Agar is wrong about the interests of moral post-persons. Mere persons such as ourselves should therefore engender moral post-persons.

OBJECTIONS

I have argued that we should engender moral post-persons on the grounds that doing so best promotes our own interests as mere persons.

One objection is that there is no guarantee that moral post-persons would have the moral capacities of morally exemplary mere persons. For example, there is no guarantee that they would be concerned with the interests of others. Instead, beings with a higher or different moral status might have different moral capacities, capacities that don't overlap with those of moral exemplars.

Moral post-persons will be better than morally exemplary mere persons. If the moral capacities of moral post-persons are different in kind from those of moral exemplars, then we're wrong about who moral exemplars are and, consequently, what constitutes admirable moral behavior. That is, if moral post-persons are totally unlike moral exemplars in their moral behavior, then we're wrong about who are the morally best of mere persons. The best of mere persons will necessarily share the greatest degree of moral capacities with moral post-persons. If

we are wrong about who moral exemplars are, then we're wrong about what moral behaviors are in this set of shared capacities. If we are wrong about what's in this set, then a strong case can be made that we're wrong about what constitutes moral behavior, which only increases the need for moral post-persons. We would need them to correct our inaccurate judgments about what constitutes moral behavior.

Relatedly, one might claim that my argument that we ought to engender moral post-persons is conditional on Zagzebski's account, which weakens the claim. My conclusion is conditional on the idea that moral exemplars are exemplary in part because they promote others' interests prior to their own. There are multiple ways one might establish this. Zagzebski offers one account, but there may be others. One need not accept Zagzebski's account to accept that moral exemplars are people who promote others' interests prior to their own. What *would* be a problem for my argument is if moral exemplars were not people who promote others' interests prior to their own—if, when faced with a conflict between their own interests and the interests of others, exemplars pursue their own. But if that were true, we would need moral post-persons more than ever so that they can correct our erroneous moral judgments about what properties moral exemplars exhibit.

A third objection is that although moral post-persons are likely to be motivated to promote others' interests, like moral exemplars are, they may only be motivated to promote the interests of those who have the same moral status. Since mere persons will have a lower moral status, moral post-persons are unlikely to promote mere persons' interests. Would Leopold Socha and the Holocaust rescuers have behaved in the same way had the beings needing saving been beings with arguably lower moral status, such as chimpanzees? Agar is right after all: the ranking of moral status matters.

As moral status increases, so does the scope of beings whose interests are considered and promoted.²⁷ Mere persons routinely consider the interests of other beings and often promote them. The scope of beings whose interests mere persons promote seems wider than the scope of beings whose interests chimpanzees promote. Dogs arguably promote the interests of an even narrower range of beings, if at all. Conversely, relative to the moral status of mere persons, as a being's moral status gets closer to personhood, the more mere persons consider and promote it. Mere persons routinely dedicate their lives, often at the expense of their own interests, to promote the interests of beings with arguably lower moral status. The scope of beings whose interests moral post-persons consider and promote is likely to be wider than it is for mere persons. And the degree to which the interests of beings with a lower moral status than that of moral post-persons are considered and promoted is likely to be greater than it is for mere persons. That is, moral post-persons aren't to mere persons as mere persons are to chimpanzees; moral post-persons will promote to a greater degree the interests of beings of lower moral status than mere persons do.

A further point is that if moral post-persons are so strongly motivated to promote others' interests that they seek out opportunities to do so (I haven't argued that they would be), they will most easily satisfy this motivation by promoting the interests of other beings. The need for promotion of mere persons' interests is great, and moral post-persons can most easily satisfy their motivation to save others and position others to flourish by promoting the interests of mere persons.

²⁷ The association between moral status increase and the widening of the scope of beings whose interests are considered may be due to the fact that these considerations are a function of moral agency, and as moral agency develops so does moral status. Thanks to an anonymous referee for this point.

In response to Thomas Douglas' argument that the unenhanced may benefit from moral enhancement,²⁸ Alfred Archer identifies other potential burdens that the unenhanced may bear.²⁹ Archer argues that because the enhanced will raise the average moral behavior, the threshold for which acts are praiseworthy will go up, and the threshold for which acts are blameworthy will go down, making it harder for the unenhanced to perform praiseworthy actions and easier to perform blameworthy actions. This is a burden for two reasons, Archer claims. One is that it is unpleasant to be blamed and pleasant to be praised. The other is that people want to be worthy of praise and not worthy of blame. If the enhanced change the standards of praiseworthiness and blameworthiness, the lives of the unenhanced will be worse. Thus, one could raise the same objection to my claim, arguing that moral post-persons will behave in such a way that makes it more difficult for mere persons to be worthy of praise and be praised and more likely that they will be worthy of blame and be blamed, and this is a burden too costly to bear.

For the sake of expediency, I grant that Archer is right that the average moral behavior drives the appropriateness of attributions of praise and blame. But blameworthiness and praiseworthiness are also a matter of what one can do. The moral capacities of moral post-persons are so much greater than those of mere persons that they have a different moral status. Given this great difference in capability and that differences in abilities imply differences in responsibility,³⁰ what counts as worthy of praise or blame for moral post-persons will be different than what counts as worthy of praise or blame for mere persons. They are in two different classes with different standards, as determined by their abilities. Archer claims that

²⁸ Douglas, T. (2008). Moral Enhancement. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 25(3), 228–245. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5930.2008.00412.x>

²⁹ Archer, A. (2016). Moral Enhancement and Those Left Behind. *Bioethics*, 30(7), 500–510. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bioe.12251>

³⁰ One need not accept that 'ought' implies 'can' for it to be true that what one ought do is tied to what one can do. The logical relation can be something weaker than implication (S. Scheall and Crutchfield, P. The Priority of the Epistemic, forthcoming, *Episteme*).

moral status doesn't matter to his argument, but it does. It matters because praiseworthiness and blameworthiness will be different for moral post-persons and mere persons. Since responsibility will be different, there is no burden of not being praiseworthy or being overly blameworthy. Further, there is no reason to think that mere persons will be subjected to less praise or more blame than they otherwise would, because the standards for such attributions are no different than they would be if there were no moral post-persons. So there ought to be no worry that the engendering of moral post-persons will leave the lives of mere persons worse off due to being less frequently praised and praiseworthy and more frequently blamed and blameworthy.

A fifth objection is that moral exemplars are the moral ceiling—it's not possible to be better than morally exemplary mere persons. Thus, moral post-persons will be no better than moral exemplars.

This objection is tantamount to the claim that moral post-persons are impossible. Even if it is true that moral post-persons are impossible, it doesn't mean that we shouldn't try to engender moral exemplars. A world full of moral exemplars, while not as good as one full of moral post-persons, is still a world in which the interests of mere persons are better promoted.

Sixth, one might object to the analogy between morally exemplary mere persons and moral post-persons on the grounds that moral post-persons won't have acquired their moral capacities in the same sense that moral exemplars have. Since there is a relevant dissimilarity between moral exemplars and moral-post persons, it's not possible to conclude that moral post-persons will resemble moral exemplars.

First, it's not clear that moral post-persons, by being enhanced, won't have acquired their improved moral capacities. If they volunteer for, or even merely assent to, the enhancement because they have a deep desire to be better people, then we may rightly say that they acquired their improved moral capacities. Second, it doesn't matter. The argument that we should

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engender moral post-persons gets off the ground because doing so promotes the interests of mere persons. Whether moral post-persons have acquired their moral capacities or they are due to enhancement doesn't change the fact that they will promote the interests of mere persons. We might admire more Hank Aaron for hitting 755 home runs without the aid of enhancement, but that doesn't change the fact that Barry Bonds hit more home runs (762) while on steroids. Similarly, we might admire moral exemplars more for acquiring the motivation to promote others' interests than we do moral post-persons, but that doesn't change the fact that moral post-persons will be better at promoting mere persons' interests.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that we should engender moral post-persons, because doing so promotes the interests of mere persons. If moral enhancement is likely to engender moral post-persons, then we should morally enhance mere persons. How this is achieved is another matter. On the one hand, making enhancement compulsory seems more likely to engender more moral post-persons. In turn, the more moral post-persons there are the more the interests of mere persons can be promoted. On the other hand, if every mere person is enhanced to become a moral post-person, then there are no interests of mere persons to promote, because there are no mere persons. It might be that the world in which there are some mere persons is better than the world in which there are only moral post-persons.