

Moral Enhancement and Those Left Behind

Abstract: Opponents to genetic or biomedical human enhancement often claim that the availability of these technologies would have negative consequences for those who either choose not to utilize these resources or lack access to them. However, Thomas Douglas has argued that this objection has no force against the use of technologies that aim to bring about morally desirable character traits, as the unenhanced would benefit from being surrounded by such people. I will argue that things are not as straightforward as Douglas makes out. The widespread use of moral enhancement would raise the standards for praise and blame worthiness, making it much harder for the unenhanced to perform praiseworthy actions or avoid performing blameworthy actions. This shows that supporters of moral enhancement cannot avoid this challenge in the way that Douglas suggests.

Introduction

Suppose humanity had the potential to use biomedical enhancement techniques to produce human beings with morally improved character traits. What would the moral implications of the availability of this technology be? This question is not one of mere theoretical importance. There are a number of existing drugs that may be capable of doing this job. The neurotransmitter Oxytocin, for example, has been found by Kosfield et al. to increase levels of trust and

cooperation between people.¹ Similarly, Terbeck et al. have found that there is evidence to suggest that Propranolol may reduce implicit negative racial bias.²

It is no surprise then, that this question has been the subject of much debate in the recent philosophical literature. Ingmar Persson and Julian Savulescu have argued that there is a moral obligation to engage in a programme of moral enhancement to improve our moral capabilities.³ This position has been criticized by a number of philosophers. Some, like John Harris have criticized this position as one that would curtail our freedom.⁴ Others offer a less radical defence

¹ See M. Kosfeld et al. Oxytocin Increases Trust in Humans. *Nature* 2005; 435, 673–676. Though there are reasons to doubt oxytocin’s potential, as a moral enhancer as it has also been found to promote in-group favouritism, intergroup bias and ethnocentrism See C. K. W. De Dreu et al. Oxytocin promotes human ethnocentrism. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 2011; 108, 1262–1266.

² S. Terbeck et al. Beta- Adrenergic Blockade Reduces Implicit Negative Racial Bias. *Psychopharmacology* 2012; 222: 419-424.

³ I. Persson, & J. Savulescu. 2012. *Unfit for the Future: The Need for Moral Enhancement*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

⁴ See J. Harris. Moral enhancement and Freedom *Bioethics* 2011; 25: 102-111. For a response to these worries see T. Douglas. Moral Enhancement via Direct Emotion Modulation: A Reply to John Harris. *Bioethics* 2013; 27: 160-168, I. Persson, & J. Savulescu. Moral Enhancement, Freedom and the God Machine *The Monist* 2012; 95: 399-421 and I. Persson, & J. Savulescu. Getting Moral Enhancement Right: The Desirability of Moral Bioenhancement. *Bioethics* 2013; 27: 124-131.

of moral enhancement. Thomas Douglas for example, argues that this form of enhancement is morally permissible.⁵

My aim in this paper will be to evaluate the claim that moral enhancement through biomedical means would be beneficial for those who are not morally enhanced.⁶ While there has been a great deal of discussion about the effects that enhancement in general would have on the unenhanced, particularly with regards to moral status,⁷ the issue of whether or not the enhancements aimed at increasing morally desirable psychological features would benefit the unenhanced is relatively unexplored. It is often claimed that human enhancement in general would have bad consequences for the unenhanced.⁸ In the course of his defence of the moral permissibility of this form of moral enhancement, Douglas claims that whatever the strengths of this objection to the use of biomedical or genetic enhancements in general, it cannot be raised

⁵ T. Douglas. Moral Enhancement. *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 2008; 25: 228-245.

⁶ I will restrict myself in this paper to discussing biomedical enhancements, as genetic enhancements raise issues that go beyond the scope of this paper. Thanks to an anonymous referee for helpful discussion here.

⁷ See A. Buchanan. 2011. *Beyond Humanity? The Ethics of Biomedical Enhancement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, D. DeGrazia. Genetic Enhancement, Post-persons and Moral Status: A Reply to Buchanan. *Journal of Medical Ethics* 2012; 38: 135-139. F. Fukuyama. Transhumanism. *Foreign Policy* 2004; 144: 42–43, J. Wilson Transhumanism and Moral Equality. *Bioethics* 2007; 21: 419–425. J. Wilson. Persons, Post-Persons and Thresholds. *Journal of Medical Ethics* 2011; 38: 143-144.

⁸ See M. Sandel. 2007. *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 89-91 and S. Segall. 2010. *Health, Luck, and Justice*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press: 133-4.

against the use of moral enhancements.⁹ In this paper I will argue that this issue is more complex than Douglas acknowledges.

I will start in, §1, by investigating Douglas' claim that living amongst people enhanced for morally desirable psychological features would tend to benefit the unenhanced. I will then, in §2, argue that while Douglas is right to point out that there are ways in which the unenhanced will benefit from living amongst morally enhanced people, these would be accompanied by a significant disadvantage. The widespread use of moral enhancement would raise the standards for praise and blame worthiness, making it much harder for the unenhanced to perform praiseworthy actions or avoid performing blameworthy actions. In §3, I will respond to some objections that might be raised against this argument. I will finish, in §4, by looking at whether the costs for the unenhanced are likely to be outweighed by the benefits. I will argue that there is good reason to think that, at least for some subgroups of the unenhanced, the costs will outweigh the benefits.

Before I begin it is worth briefly stating what I take 'moral enhancement' to mean. There are a number of competing definitions in the literature and assessing the various merits and problems with each definition is beyond the scope of this paper.¹⁰ For my purposes then, I will assume that

⁹ Douglas, op. cit, note 5, p. 203

¹⁰ For a useful overview of the competing definitions see K. Rauset al. On Defining Moral Enhancement: A Clarificatory Taxonomy. *Neuroethics* 2014; 7: 263-273.

a moral enhancement is something that makes the subject of the enhancement more likely to perform morally good acts for the right reasons.¹¹

1. Benefits for The Unenhanced

An objection that is often raised against genetic or biomedical human enhancement in general is that it would unfairly disadvantage those who do not have or make use of the opportunity to enhance themselves.¹² It is not hard to see why this might be the case. An athlete who chooses not to take steroids will be significantly disadvantaged if all his competitors are on steroids. Similarly, a student's performance will look far less impressive if all of her peers are on cognitive enhancing drugs. Given the many areas of competition and comparison in human life, if one section of society decides to start bio-medically enhancing themselves or their children, then it will put the rest of society at a disadvantage.

However, Douglas argues that this objection cannot be raised against moral enhancement because this form of enhancement "will tend to be to the advantage of others."¹³ This leads Douglas to conclude that, "One could not object to moral enhancement on the ground that it would systematically impose morally gratuitous disadvantage on others."¹⁴

This is indeed a tempting view, as there are several important ways in which living amongst morally enhanced beings would be beneficial for the unenhanced. First, those who have been

¹¹ This definition is quite close to Douglas' definition of moral enhancement as "interventions that will expectably leave an individual with more moral (viz. morally better) motives or behaviour than she would otherwise have had." Douglas, *op. cit.*, note 4, p. 162.

¹² See Footnote 3.

¹³ Douglas, *op. cit.*, note 5, p. 230.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 230.

enhanced will be less likely to perform immoral acts. This means that the unenhanced could expect a decreased likelihood of being the victim of immoral acts. Second, the enhanced will be more likely to perform morally virtuous acts, meaning the unenhanced can expect an increased likelihood of benefitting from the virtuous behaviour of others. Finally, the unenhanced will gain from the psychological wellbeing that would be likely to arise from living in a world where morally bad acts are more rare and morally good acts more common.

2. Costs For The Unenhanced

Despite the benefits for the unenhanced considered in the previous section, I will argue that there will also be important costs associated with living amongst the morally enhanced.

One way in which the use of enhancements for morally desirable traits might harm the unenhanced is by threatening their moral status. This, after all, has been a common objection to human enhancement in general.¹⁵ The worry is that what gives humans greater moral standing than other animals is that we possess greater mental capacities. As a result, if beings with more

¹⁵ See F. Fukuyama (2002). *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*.

Macmillan. p.42. For responses to these worries see Buchanan op. cit. note 7; T. Douglas.

Human Enhancement and Supra-personal Moral Status. *Philosophical Studies* 2013; 162: 473-497; J.

McMahan. Cognitive Disability and Cognitive Enhancement *Metaphilosophy* 2009; 40: 582–605;

and J. Savulescu. 2009. The Human Prejudice and The Moral Status of Enhanced Beings: What Do We Owe The Gods? In *Human Enhancement* J. Savulescu & N. Bostrom (Eds.), Oxford:

Oxford University Press: 211–247. For a reply to some of these responses see N. Ager. Why is it

Possible to Enhance Moral Status and Why Doing so is Wrong? *Journal of Medical Ethics* 2013; 39: 67-74.

advanced cognitive powers than humans exist then these beings will have a higher moral standing.

The question of whether morally enhancing people increases their moral status is an interesting one. One response to this worry is that the kinds of enhancement we have considered so far would not lead to beings with enhanced moral status as they would only possess morally desirable psychological traits not greater mental capacities. Another response would be to claim that there is just no higher moral status than that of a person.¹⁶ Finally, it could be argued that there is no good reason to think that this would alter the moral status of the unenhanced.¹⁷ However, we might equally think that enhancing our moral capacities would enhance our moral status, particularly if it was our moral reasoning capacity that was enhanced. For the purposes of this paper I am willing to grant the supporter of moral enhancement the claim that it would not lead to increased moral status. This is acceptable, as all I intend to show is that moral enhancement will bring about some significant costs for the unenhanced. If it turns out moral enhancement would bring about an increase in moral status for the morally enhanced, then this may cause problems for the supporter of moral enhancement but it will not provide any problems for my thesis.

There is good reason to think that even if the unenhanced would not suffer from diminished moral status, living amongst those enhanced for morally desirable traits would produce harms for the unenhanced. Life amongst the morally enhanced will be one where it is much more difficult for the unenhanced to perform morally praiseworthy acts or to avoid performing blameworthy acts. This is because there is good reason to think that what people are praised or

¹⁶ See Buchanan *op cit.*, note 7, Ch. 7 for a defence of this claim.

¹⁷ This point is suggested by T. Douglas *Medical Means, Moral Ends: Enhancement, Fairness and Moral Motivation*. Unpublished D.Phil Thesis University of Oxford: 151.

blame worthy for is at least partially determined by the level of moral behaviour that most people manage to obtain. This point is summed up perfectly by Adam Smith in the following:

When we are determining the degree of blame or applause which seems due to any action, we very frequently make use of two different standards. The first is the idea of complete propriety and perfection, which, in those difficult situations, no human conduct ever did, or ever can come up to; and in comparison with which the actions of all men must for ever appear blameable and imperfect. The second is the idea of that degree of proximity or distance from this complete perfection which the actions of the greater part of men commonly arrive at. Whatever goes beyond this degree, how far soever it may be removed from absolute perfection, seems to deserve applause; and whatever falls short of it, to deserve blame.¹⁸

The basic thought here is that the standards of blameworthiness are to some extent determined by the level of moral behaviour that most people are capable of achieving. This thought has a great deal of intuitive appeal. People are often judged against the standards set by what ordinary people manage to achieve rather than the standards of perfection. For example, people who give more to charity than average or perform more voluntary work than average are deemed praiseworthy even if they have fallen short of the standards of moral perfection. There are two justifications that might be given for this thought.

The first is a Rule-consequentialist one. R. M. Hare argues that tying the level of duty to the standard of moral perfection would have disastrous consequences, as most will fail to meet this

¹⁸ A. Smith. 1790. *The Nature of The Moral Sentiments (6th Edition)* Reprinted by Oxford: Oxford University Press 1976: 26.

standard.¹⁹ What we need claims Hare, are principles to determine the standards of moral obligation that will have the highest-acceptance utility and accept that any morally good acts that exceed this are supererogatory.²⁰ On this account people only act wrongly when they fail to live up to the standards of minimal decency, which are in turn at least partially determined by what standards we can expect people to comply to. As a society's moral behaviour improves, the minimum standards of behaviour that everyone is expected to attain will be raised. John Stuart Mill endorses this thought in the following:

The domain of moral duty, in an improving society, is always widening. When what once was uncommon virtue becomes common virtue, it comes to be numbered among obligations, while a degree exceeding what has grown common, remains simply meritorious.²¹

As the standards of average moral behaviour rise, so too do the standards of duty. Those who have not been morally enhanced will find these standards increasingly hard to live up to.

¹⁹ R. M. Hare. 1981. *Moral Thinking*. Oxford: Clarendon Press: 201.

²⁰ *Ibid* p. 203. Similar positions are defended by both B. Hooker. 2002. *Ideal Code, Real World: A Rule-Consequentialist Theory of Morality* Oxford: Oxford University Press: Ch.3; and J. O. Urmson. 1958. Saints and Heroes. Reprinted in *Moral Concepts* J. Feinberg (ed.) Oxford: Oxford University Press: 70.

²¹ J. S. Mill. 1961. *Collected works of John Stuart Mill*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press: Vol. X, p. 338.

The next step of this justification is to point out that moral wrongness and moral obligation are conceptually tied to blameworthiness.²² Of course, it is important not to overstate this link. After all praiseworthiness and blameworthiness are agent assessments rather than act assessments. In order for an agent to be blameworthy for performing a wrong act it is usually thought that she must lack an excuse. Similarly performing an act that goes beyond duty would only be praiseworthy if performed for the right reasons. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to think that someone without an excuse is always blameworthy for performing a wrong act and someone who performs a supererogatory act for the right reasons is always praiseworthy.²³ If this is the case then raising the level of duty will make performing praiseworthy acts more demanding and blameworthy acts harder to avoid.

²² The claim that moral wrongness and obligation are conceptually tied to blameworthiness is made by S. Darwall. 2006. *The Second Person Standpoint* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press: 27, A. Gibbard. 1990. *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press: 42; B. McElwee ‘The rights and wrongs of consequentialism’. *Philosophical Studies* 2010; 151: 400; D. Portmore. 2011. *Commonsense Consequentialism: Wherein Morality Meets Rationality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 43; J. Skorupski. 1999. *Ethical Explorations* Oxford: Oxford University Press: 29.

²³ Some claim that supererogatory acts are *always* praiseworthy. See P. McNamara. Supererogation, Inside and Out: Toward an Adequate Scheme for Common-Sense Morality. *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics Volume 1*. 2011. Oxford: Oxford University Press. For arguments against this way of defining supererogation see A. Archer. Supererogation and Intentions of The Agent. *Philosophia*. 2013; 41:447-462. And A. Archer ‘Are Acts of Supererogation Always Praiseworthy?’ *Theoria* (Forthcoming).

The next way to justify this thought is by linking the average level of moral achievement not to the line of duty but directly to blameworthiness. There is no need to think that the average level of moral achievement plays a role in determining the level of duty in order to think that it plays a role in determining the level of blameworthiness. We might, for example, think that everyone is obliged to do the best they can at all times. However, it is compatible with this view to hold that someone's level of blameworthiness is at least partially determined by the average level of moral performance. While presumably someone who holds such a view would think that most people act wrongly most of the time it might be thought that they should not always be considered blameworthy for this. Instead we might reserve blame for those who fail to live up to the average standard and praise those who go beyond it. For example, someone who holds such a view might think that people should donate all of their resources to worthwhile charities up until the point where giving fails to have an overall positive impact. Now let's imagine someone who donates most of her income to charity but for whom giving more would still have a positive impact overall. According to a supporter of the view we are considering this person acts wrongly. However, the supporter of this view might hold that this person is much less blameworthy than someone with similar levels of disposable income who donates nothing.

To return to the issue of moral enhancement, if moral enhancement is permitted then presumably we can expect the average level of moral achievement to be raised. This in turn will make it harder for those who have not been morally enhanced to be praiseworthy or to avoid being blameworthy. This is important for the discussion of whether moral enhancement will benefit those who are not enhanced because being blamed is generally taken to be unpleasant and something we aim to avoid. Depending on what theory of blame we endorse this unpleasantness may be the result of a negative judgement of character,²⁴ being subject to

²⁴ See G. Watson Two Faces of Responsibility. *Philosophical Topics*. 1996; 24: 227-248.

negative reactive attitudes such as anger or resentment²⁵ or through suffering an impairment in our relationship with the person blaming us.²⁶ Whatever the account of blame, though, I take it that in order to be at all plausible it must be capable of accounting for the fact that it is unpleasant to be blamed.²⁷ In the same way, to be praiseworthy and to be praised is pleasant.²⁸ I take it that it is also plausible that being praiseworthy and avoiding blameworthiness are also widely desired. If we assume that being praise or blame worthy increases the chances of being praised or blamed then a course of action that raises the standards of both praise and blame worthiness, such as biomedical or genetic moral enhancement, will have negative consequences for those that will struggle to meet this new standard. To avoid blameworthy behaviour and act in a praiseworthy way will be more difficult for those surrounded by morally enhanced people. As a result, whatever benefits the unenhanced receive from living amongst morally enhanced people they will also be subject to a significant cost.

²⁵ See P. F. Strawson. Freedom and Resentment. *Proceedings of the British Academy* 1962; 48: 1-25.

R. J. Wallace. 2011. Dispassionate Opprobrium: On Blame and the Reactive Sentiments. *Reasons and Recognition: Essays on the Philosophy of T. M. Scanlon*. Ed. R. J. Wallace, R.Kumar and S.Freeman. New York: Oxford University Press: 348–72.

²⁶ See T. M. Scanlon. 2008. *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

²⁷ See M. Mason 'Blame: Taking it Seriously.' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 2011; 83: 473-481.

²⁸ See A. Smith, *op cit.*, note 18, p.114.

This is the case regardless of our view of well-being. On a hedonist account, according to which the level of an agent's well-being is determined by her balance of pleasure and pain²⁹ then the reduced opportunity for pleasure will count as a cost. If we hold a Desire Fulfillment View³⁰, according to which well-being consists of the fulfillment of one's desires, then providing it is true that people generally do desire that to be praiseworthy and not to be blameworthy then this will also count as a cost. Finally, on an Objective List View, according to which there are a number of factors that contribute to an agent's level of well-being,³¹ this might count as a cost on a number of fronts. First, there is the count to the level of pleasure experience by the agent and Objective List Theories typically include pleasure on the list of contributing factors.³² Second, it might impact the level of achievement the agent attains, another factor that is included on the list by some Objective List theorists.³³

In this section I have argued that the widespread use of moral enhancement would bring about costs for those who do not undergo moral enhancement. It would do so by raising the standards for praise and blame worthiness, making it much harder for the unenhanced to perform praiseworthy actions or avoid performing blameworthy actions.

²⁹ For a defence of this view see J. Bentham 1996 [1789], *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

³⁰ See, for example, R. Brandt. 1979. *A Theory of the Good and the Right*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

³¹ Proponents of this view include G. Fletcher. A Fresh Start for the Objective-List Theory of Well-Being. *Utilitas* 2013; 25: 206-220; and D. Parfit. 1984. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³² As both Parfit, *Ibid*, p.502 and Fletcher *op cit.*, note 31, p.214 do.

³³ See Fletcher, *Ibid*, p.214.

Before proceeding to considering objections to this account it is worth, in the interests of avoiding confusion, briefly distinguishing this objection from a recent objection that has been raised against moral enhancement. Robert Sparrow argues that moral enhancement is problematic for those who endorse egalitarianism.³⁴ Without going into the details of Sparrow's argument it is worth pointing out that my argument is not based on an appeal to egalitarian concerns. I am claiming that the use of moral enhancements would be harmful for the unenhanced, as it would raise the level of praise and blame worthiness. Note that this is compatible with a widespread program of enhancement that made society *more* equal. Suppose, for example, that only those with bad moral characters were given moral enhancements. This might be thought to make for a more egalitarian society. However, if we accept that the levels of praise and blame worthiness are in some way responsive to the average levels of attainment then it would remain the case that the standards for praise and blame worthiness would be raised by this kind of enhancement programme. The average level is determined by those who fall below it as much by those who surpass it. As a result, raising the level of those who previously failed to meet the average will in turn raise the average level. The unenhanced would then still face the prospect of higher standards for praise and blame worthiness.³⁵

3. Objections and Responses

In this section I will respond to various problems that might be raised against my argument. First, it could be claimed in response that the average standard of moral behaviour does not determine an agent's *blameworthiness* but only how much people would actually be praised or

³⁴ R. Sparrow Egalitarianism and Moral Bioenhancement. *The American Journal of Bioethics*, 2014; 14: 20-28. For a response to Sparrow's argument see A. T. Wilson, Egalitarianism and Successful Moral Bioenhancement. *The American Journal of Bioethics*, 2014; 14: 35-36.

³⁵ Thanks to an anonymous referee for helpful discussion here.

blamed. It could be claimed that the standards of praise and blame worthiness are in no way related to the average level of moral performance. The reason why the level of the actual praise and blame someone might receive might alter in line with the average level of moral performance could simply be a prioritizing of resources. In a world where people are performing extremely blameworthy acts there may not be time to give the moderately blameworthy all of the blame that they deserve. Similarly, in a world where extraordinarily praiseworthy acts are rare people will be more likely to praise people who perform moderately praiseworthy acts.

Of course, whether or not this response is successful depends upon one's view about the nature of moral duty and the nature of moral praiseworthiness and blameworthiness. In the last section I gave some reasons to support the view that praise and blame worthiness are related to the average level of moral achievement but this is, of course, far from a complete defence of such a position. Nevertheless, I take it that, while this claim about the *worthiness* of praise and blame can be denied, it is much harder to reject the claim about how much we actually would praise or blame someone. It might be that a persuasive case can be made that the average level of moral behaviour is not relevant to praise and blame worthiness. If such a case were made I could simply retreat to the claim that it is only the *actual* level of praise and blame given for certain actions. This will be enough to support the claim that the unenhanced would face a significant cost.

Alternatively, it could be objected that all my argument has shown is that *praiseworthiness* and *blameworthiness* will be harder to achieve for the unenhanced. However, I simply assumed that this would increase the levels of *actual* praise and blame that the unenhanced would receive.

In response to this worry it should be acknowledged that this claim does rest on an empirical claim that I have not provided evidence for. Nevertheless, it does seem plausible that, on the view of praise and blame worthiness I have been appealing to, the levels of the praise and blame people receive for their actions will reflect a change in average moral attainment. After all, even if

people are not sensitive to the degree to which people are actually worthy of praise or blame when they praise or blame people, it seems likely that they would be fairly sensitive to the degree to which people's behaviour matches up to the average level of conduct.

Another way of responding to this objection is to point out that people do not only want to be praised but also to be *worthy* of praise. Adam Smith makes this point convincingly in the following, "Man desires, not only to be loved, but to be lovely; or to be that thing which natural property of love [...] *He desires not only praise but praiseworthiness. [...] He dreads, not only blame, but blameworthiness.*"³⁶ As Smith points out, people want to be praised and to avoid being blamed but they also want to be *worthy* of that praise and not to be worthy of blame. If we accept this then even if raising the level of praiseworthiness does not alter the level of praise and blame people receive it may still be thought to make them worse off.³⁷

Another objection that might be raised is that the unenhanced may not be left behind in the way I suggest. Perhaps, the morally enhanced could set a moral example to the unenhanced, which would in turn allow the unenhanced to reach the same level of moral attainment.³⁸ We might think that the enhanced would provide role models for the unenhanced, which would inspire the

³⁶ Smith op. cit., note 18, pp. 113 – 114 Emphasis Added.

³⁷ This might be thought to assume a Desire Fulfillment Account of wellbeing, that is one that views welfare in terms of the fulfillment of desires. However, it seems reasonable to think that a plausible Objective List Theory would make moral achievement a component of wellbeing. Similarly if we accept the plausible claim that it is, for the most part, pleasurable for people to recognize that they have acted in a praiseworthy way and unpleasant to recognize that one is blameworthy, then this claim is also compatible with Hedonism, the view that pleasure is the only source of wellbeing.

³⁸ Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting this response.

unenanced to morally improve themselves. If this were the case then we might think that the existence of morally enhanced people would provide no disadvantages to the unenhanced, as the unenhanced would quickly be inspired to reach similar levels of moral attainment.

However, while it may well be right to point out the possibility of this process of moral education there seems good reason to think that this process will not remove all disadvantages to the unenhanced. First, while this form of education may be available to the unenhanced, the process of moral development may be a difficult and demanding one to achieve without the use of enhancements. To make matters worse, it may be that some people are simply incapable of achieving this standard. Second, this process of moral education will have little role to play in enhancements aimed at improving the moral character of those who fall well below the existing average standard, as those in this position will already have access to a wide range of role models for appropriate moral behaviour. If these existing role models were not playing a morally educative role then there seems little reason to think that new role models will be any more effective. While it is right, then, to say that the morally enhanced may play an educative role this does not seem to eliminate the disadvantages I have pointed out for the morally unenhanced.

Another problem that might be raised is that morally enhanced people would not disadvantage the lives of the unenhanced, as the enhanced would be gracious enough to accept the shortcomings of the unenhanced. Perhaps the morally enhanced would be willing to accept that they must hold the unenhanced to lower moral standards. One might think that the morally enhanced would then use praise and blame as a form of moral education rather than a form of direct moral address. When educating children we quite often use praise and blame in ways that would be inappropriate for ordinary adults. Perhaps, the morally enhanced would take a similar approach to praising and blaming the unenhanced. If this is accepted then there is no longer good reason to think that the unenhanced would suffer from being held to higher moral standards than they were before people began to morally enhance themselves.

The first response to this objection is to point out that there is no reason to think that any of the available means of moral enhancement would ensure that the enhanced would be so understanding of the unenhanced. A drug that increases cooperation or trust or reduces implicit bias would not necessarily lead to a more forgiving attitude for those with morally inferior character traits. Even if a form of enhancement that would also have this effect were discovered, it would produce its own negative consequences for the unenhanced. If the enhanced held the unenhanced to lower moral standards compared to those to which they hold themselves, then this would create a two tier moral system. This would be damaging for the unenhanced, as they would be left with an unequal system of morality that would leave the unenhanced in a significantly worse off situation. To see why, imagine a society in which one half of the population can be relied upon to act morally and the other cannot. In such a society the unenhanced would find themselves at a strong competitive disadvantage. All else being equal, who would choose the morally unreliable person as a spouse, a friend or employee? In addition to this competitive disadvantage, the unenhanced might also face the humiliating prospect of being treated like children by the morally enhanced members of society. This would be likely to undermine both their sense of living in a society of equals and their sense of autonomy.³⁹

Another response that might be raised is that those who morally enhance themselves could never be morally praiseworthy for their actions, as their actions would not have moral worth. In support of this line of thought it might be claimed that while taking a genetic or biomedical moral enhancement may improve one's moral behaviour it cannot improve one's moral worth. In order for an action to have moral worth, we might think that people need to be capable of acting well without the use of these shortcuts.

³⁹ Thanks to an anonymous referee for helpful discussion here.

However, at least on the standard accounts of moral worth, moral enhancements do not seem to threaten, and may actually improve, an agent's moral worth.⁴⁰ On a Kantian view, for example, an action has moral worth if and only if it is performed from the maxim of duty.⁴¹ In other words, in order for an action to have moral worth the agent must be aiming to ensure her acts conform to the moral law and she must have adopted this aim out of respect for this law. It is not enough that the act has good consequences nor that it stems from a pleasant or virtuous disposition. A more recent view of moral worth, defended by Julia Markovits, is that an action has moral worth if and only if the reasons that motivate an agent to perform an act coincide with the reasons that morally justify the act.⁴² While both views of moral worth may rule out the possibility of certain some forms of genetic or biomedical interventions enhancing an agent's moral worth, there seems no reason to think that all enhancements will be like this.

Enhancements that aim to alter an agent's inclinations without making the agent aware of the relevant moral duty or moral reasons will presumably not enhance an agent's moral worth. A prime example of this form of 'enhancement' is The Ludovico Technique found in Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*.⁴³ This is a form of aversion therapy that makes the 'patient' feel nauseous at the mere thought of violence. If successful such a treatment would prevent previously violent people from acting violently. However, it would not make an agent act from the maxim of duty or be motivated by the reasons that justify an act's performance. However,

⁴⁰ Similar points are made by T. Douglas. Enhancing Moral Conformity and Enhancing Moral Worth. *Neuroethics* 2014; 7: 75-91.

⁴¹ I. Kant. 1993. *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated by J.W. Ellington Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing: 12.

⁴² J. Markovitis Acting for the Right Reasons. *Philosophical Review* 2010; 119: 205.

⁴³ A. Burgess. 1962. *A Clockwork Orange*. William Heinemann.

other forms of moral enhancement might be thought to make the agent more aware of the moral law or the morally justifying reasons. If Terbeck et al. are right to suggest that Propranolol may reduce implicit negative racial bias then this might be thought to be a perfect example of this form of enhancement.⁴⁴ A drug with this effect would counter-act biases that distort people's views of what the right act is and make them more likely to perform an act that has moral worth.⁴⁵

Another way in which the supporter of moral enhancement might object to my argument is to claim that any costs the unenhanced will face are justified. This claim might be supported by claiming that by failing to morally enhance themselves, the unenhanced have acted in a morally objectionable way.⁴⁶ After all, the unenhanced would have had the opportunity to improve their moral behaviour by taking moral enhancements and it seems reasonable to think that this is what they morally ought to have done. If they face disadvantages as a result of this objectionable behaviour then these costs are not morally significant and need not concern anyone deciding on the permissibility or impermissibility of moral enhancement.

In addition, it might be claimed that the unenhanced have acted in a way that is not only morally suboptimal but also prudentially suboptimal. After all, by failing to morally enhance themselves, the unenhanced put themselves in a position where they must face the disadvantages outlined above. Moreover, if they had instead chosen to enhance themselves they would have benefitted

⁴⁴ See Terbeck et al, *op cit.*, note 2.

⁴⁵ A similar claim about the potential for cognitive neuroenhancements to make people more morally virtuous is made by B. E. E. Fröding. Cognitive Enhancement, Virtue Ethics and the Good Life. *Neuroethics* 2011; 4: 223-234

⁴⁶ Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting this response.

from becoming more praiseworthy moral beings and from being respected and admired members of society. This is important, as many moral philosophers claim that it is only costs to an agent's self-interest that can morally justify the performance of a morally sub-optimal act morally permissible.⁴⁷ If we accept then, that taking moral enhancements is both morally and prudentially optimal then it looks like we should accept that taking moral enhancements is morally obligatory. If we accept that people have a moral obligation to morally enhance themselves then we might think that there is little reason to worry about any potential costs the unenhanced face as a result of failing to enhance themselves. These costs will, after all, be costs that they incur only as a result of violating their moral obligations.

The problem with this response is that it assumes that the unenhanced had the opportunity to both access the enhancement and realize that taking the enhancement is what they had most reason to do. Both these assumptions can be questioned. First, if moral enhancements were not widely and cheaply available then many of the unenhanced would not have had the opportunity to enhance themselves and so would not be blameworthy for not doing so. Second, even if enhancements were widely and freely available, the unenhanced might possess reasonable doubts about their use. These doubts may be reasonable prudential concerns, perhaps about the potential side-effects of the particular form of enhancement. Alternatively they might be

⁴⁷ Those who make this claim, or the equivalent claim that all acts that go beyond what is required by morality involve sacrifice, include Jonathan Dancy. 1993. *Moral Reasons*. Oxford: Blackwell: 138, J. Feinberg. Supererogation and Rules. *Ethics* 1961; 71: 276-288 and J. S. Fishkin. 1982. *The Limits of Obligation*. Binghamton NY: Yale University Press: 14-15. Elsewhere I have argued that we should reject the claim that acts of supererogation *always* involve sacrifice. See A. Archer. Saints, Heroes and Moral Necessity. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplementary Volume* 2015; 77: 105-124. However, I do not wish to rest my argument here upon this claim.

reasonable moral concerns about the use of moral enhancements in general. They might, for example, be persuaded by John Harris' argument that moral enhancement amounts to a restriction on freedom.⁴⁸ They may also have concerns about the effect on authenticity⁴⁹ or human dignity.⁵⁰ Finally, they might have religious objections to the use of moral enhancements.⁵¹ If any of these concerns are reasonable ones then it is far from clear that we can discount the costs they must face from failing to enhance themselves. This is not to say that there would not be situations in which the unenhanced are blameworthy for failing to enhance themselves. Rather it is to point out that whether the unenhanced are blameworthy for failing to enhance themselves is going to depend upon the circumstances that led to one group of society morally enhancing themselves and another group not doing so. In order to show that the costs to the unenhanced are justified the supporter of moral enhancement would have to show that they had a reasonable opportunity to enhance themselves and that they could not have had any reasonable doubts about doing so.

One rejoinder that might be offered to the above response is that being unable to access moral enhancements provides an excuse for one's immoral behaviour. If we accept that having an excuse exempts one from blame, then in these situations the unenhanced would not face any costs, as they would not be blameworthy for their actions. If this is right, then we might think

⁴⁸ Harris op. cit., note 4.

⁴⁹ See C. Elliott. 2003. *Better than Well: American Medicine Meets the American Dream*. New York: W.W. Norton & co.

⁵⁰ See Fukuyama, op. cit. note 15.

⁵¹ For a discussion of Christian approaches to enhancement technologies see A. Lustig. Enhancement Technologies and the Person: Christian Perspectives. *The Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics* 2008; 36: 41-50.

that when the unenhanced are not blameworthy for failing to morally enhance themselves they will also be blameless for any wrongdoing that results from their unenhanced status.⁵² This would mean that no costs would result from a blameless unenhanced status. This, in turn, would mean that we can divide the unenhanced into two categories. Those who are responsible for their unenhanced status and those who are not responsible. Those who are not responsible for their status are excused from blameworthiness and so would face no costs as a result of their status. On the other hand, those who are responsible for their status deserve whatever costs result from it. This we might think provides a full solution to the problem raised in this paper.

However, there are two problems with this line of argument. First, there is an important distinction to be drawn between being excused from blame for the fact of being morally unenhanced and being excused from blame for every act that results from being unenhanced. While it seems uncontroversial that someone who is unable to access moral enhancements, or for whom access is difficult, is excused from blame for failing to morally enhance herself, it is less clear that she then has an excuse for any wrong act she performs thereafter. For example, someone with an anger management problem may have an obligation to attend anger management classes. However, if all anger management classes are prohibitively expensive then she may have an excuse for failing to do so. This does not mean, though, that whenever her anger management problems result in the performance of a morally wrong action that she is excused from blame. For example, if she murdered someone in a violent rage, then her anger management problems would provide at best a partial excuse for this behaviour. This is the case even if she is fully excused for not attending her anger management class. The same thing seems to be true of biomedical enhancements. Being unable to afford these enhancements does not obviously provide a full excuse for every subsequent wrong act the agent performs.

⁵² Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting this response.

Second, even if this does fully excuse every wrong action the agent performs then the unenhanced would again be faced with the prospect of a two-tier moral system and they would face the subsequent threats to self-respect and their view of their own autonomy that I have already discussed.

A final worry for the objection to biomedical moral enhancement that I have raised in this paper is that it proves too much. Presumably, seeking to morally improve oneself through more conventional means is morally permissible. If everyone with an anger management problem enrolled on a course to help them deal with their problem, then this may raise the average level of moral behaviour but in doing so we do not think that they would disadvantage the person who chooses not to enroll, at least not in a morally problematic way. This is an interesting response to raise against the claim that moral enhancement could create disadvantages for the unenhanced. However, if this response works for moral enhancement then it will also work for human enhancement in general. For example, those who reject the use of biomedical cognitive enhancement must explain why this form of enhancement is problematic, while non-biomedical cognitive enhancements like education are not. This is a general problem for opponents of enhancement. As a result, it cannot serve as a defence of the claim that moral enhancement avoids the objection of competitive disadvantage that human enhancement in general must face. The issue of whether and why disadvantaging people through bio-medical enhancement is problematic in a way that conventional methods of self-improvement are not is an interesting and controversial one. The important point for our purposes is that the advocate of moral enhancement cannot simply sidestep this debate.

However, we might think that there is a specific concern about the use of this kind of argument when it comes to moral enhancement. This concern is that we do not think that the people left behind by traditional forms of moral enhancement are the victims of a morally significant harm. For example, someone who retains their bigoted attitudes while society in general becomes less

bigoted is not generally thought to suffer a morally significant harm if they are blamed or ostracized as a result. Why, then, should we think the case is different for biomedical enhancement?

The important difference between this case and the case of biomedical enhancement can be found by returning to the previous point about the reasonable objections someone might have to biomedical enhancement. As we have already seen, someone may have a number of reasonable moral objections to the use of moral enhancements. They may worry about side-effects, or think that their use amounts to a restriction on freedom or that it would be contrary to religious teachings. Of course we might remain unmoved by any or all of these concerns. However, in so far as they are concerns that reasonable people might have, it seems that there is an important difference between biomedical enhancement and traditional forms of moral enhancement. If we accept that reasonable people may object to biomedical moral enhancement on prudential or moral grounds then it seems like there is a relevant difference between the bigot and the person who chooses not to take biomedical enhancements. Unlike the bigot, the morally unenhanced person may have had reasonable objections to taking biomedical moral enhancements and so seems less deserving of any blame or diminished social status that results from her choice.

We might think that there is a limit to how far this response can take us. After all, people often cite religious concerns in defence of views that have become morally unacceptable as a result of moral progress. For example, the Kentucky court clerk Kim Davies who refused to issue marriage licences to same-sex couples cited religious concerns in her defence. For many who are committed to ending discrimination based on sexual orientation this is not an adequate excuse. Moreover, the fact that Davies takes her view to have religious underpinnings does not seem to make her the victim of a morally significant harm when she faces criticism for her views. The reason for this is that it seems reasonable to think that when a society in general makes moral

progress people have a duty to morally improve themselves. In Davies' case, she should perhaps take part in a sexual orientation awareness training workshop to better understand the situation of same-sex couples applying for a marriage licence.

My point here is not so much that this is what we should think about this particular case but rather that this line of thought shows a potential problem for my claim that religious objections should count as justifications for a decision not to take biomedical enhancements. If we accept that in some cases (whether it is Davies' case or some other case) a religious objection would not excuse a failure to engage in moral improvement and that any costs faced by someone who failed to improve would be morally justifiable, then we might worry about this line of response. The reason we might worry is that allowing religious objections to count as justifications for a decision not to take biomedical enhancements might be thought to commit us to saying that it is also a justification for a failure to engage in traditional forms of moral enhancement. Moreover, it might also be thought to commit us to saying that there is something morally problematic about the costs faced by those who fail to enhance themselves.

The first response to this objection is to point out that it only works for one of the reasonable objections I pointed out that someone might have to moral enhancements. In addition to religious concerns, I also pointed out that someone might reasonably worry about the potential side effects from moral enhancements. This worry is enough to ground the claim that some of the unenhanced may have refused enhancement on reasonable grounds.

The second, related, response is that there seems to be an important difference between someone who refuses to take biomedical moral enhancements and someone who refuses to engage in more traditional forms of moral enhancement. While someone who refuses to engage

in a sexual orientation awareness training workshop has little to complain about when people shun her as a result of her homophobic views, the case of biomedical enhancement is importantly different. The reason is that biomedical enhancement involves an interference with a person's body in a way that traditional forms of enhancement do not. If we take seriously the right to bodily integrity then it seems that this would make it inappropriate to force anyone to take such an enhancement. Traditional forms of moral enhancement, on the other hand, involve no such interference with bodily integrity and so the same problem would not arise for these forms of enhancement. This allows us to say that people who do not engage in biomedical moral enhancement would have stronger grounds for complaint if they are shunned or ostracized as a result than those who receive a similar treatment as a result of failing to engage in traditional forms of moral enhancement.⁵³

4. Weighing The Costs and Benefits

I have argued that while moral enhancement is likely to bring about significant benefits for the unenhanced it will also bring about an important cost. This means that for the supporter of moral enhancement to claim, as Douglas does, that this enhancement will 'tend to be to the advantage of others'⁵⁴ must give us good reason to think that the benefits for the unenhanced will tend to outweigh the costs. A supporter of moral enhancement might insist that it is obvious that the benefits of living in a society in which people act in morally preferable ways will outweigh the small cost of it being harder to avoid being blameworthy or manage to act in a praiseworthy way.

This insistence should not go unchallenged. After all, it seems reasonable to think that we should not permit the use of any form of bio-medical enhancement until there is a clear picture of what

⁵³ Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this worry and suggesting this line of response.

⁵⁴ T. Douglas *op cit.*, note 5, p. 230.

harmful consequences, if any, will result from their use. A cautious policy of this sort would put the onus on the supporter of enhancement to convince us that the form of enhancement they are advocating would not be harmful. This means then that we should look for more than an unsupported claim that the benefits of living amongst people whose moral behaviour is improved will outweigh the costs of making blamelessness and praiseworthiness harder to achieve.

Moreover, even if, on balance, the unenhanced as a group will benefit from living amongst the morally enhanced, it might be the case that individual members of this group would be worse off overall. For example, suppose a drug were invented that enabled people with anger management problems to gain control over their temper. If those with anger management problems were allowed to take the drug, then it might well be the case that the majority of people who are not morally enhancing themselves in this way might benefit on balance from the reduced risk of being the victim of angry outbursts (despite the costs of making praiseworthy and blameless action harder to achieve). However, things may well be different for those who suffer from anger management problems and are unable to take the drug. For these people the benefits of a reduced risk of being the victim of angry outbursts are likely to be significantly outweighed by the costs of being held to higher moral standards. According to the argument I have given in this paper, as the number of people treating their anger management problems in this way grows, the level of blameworthiness attached to angry outbursts will also rise. Given that the members of this group are very likely to have angry outbursts, it seems reasonable to think that the costs of increased levels of blameworthiness for their behaviour may, in some situations, outweigh the benefits of a slight reduction in the probability of themselves being the victim of angry outbursts.

Of course, there may well be other situations in which the unenhanced will, on balance, benefit from living amongst morally enhanced people. There may also be occasions where any costs to

the unenhanced can be disregarded, perhaps because failing to enhance would be morally blameworthy. However, once we accept that we need to engage in this decision making process then it looks as if we have already accepted that there is no shortcut to the conclusion that moral enhancements are morally permissible. This, then, shows that Douglas' claim that moral enhancements can avoid a problem that can be raised against bio-medical enhancement in general is unfounded.

What this shows is that justifying the use of moral enhancements, as with the use of any human enhancement, is likely to be a tricky business. If a subgroup of the unenhanced are going to be made worse off then this seems to give us sufficient reason to worry about whether these enhancements are justified. The onus, then, is on the supporter of moral enhancement to either show that there will be no subgroup of people for whom the costs of living amongst morally enhanced people will outweigh the benefits, or to show that those who will be made worse off will be made worse off in a way that is morally justifiable.

Conclusion

In summary, I have argued that it is far from straightforward that living amongst morally enhanced people would be good for the unenhanced. Living amongst morally enhanced people would raise the average standard of moral attainment. This, in turn, would mean that the unenhanced would become more frequent targets of moral blame and be less likely to be morally praised. I have not, though, claimed that this gives us decisive reason to think that moral enhancement is impermissible. Rather it shows that the supporter of moral disposition enhancement does not avoid the challenge facing supporters of human enhancement in general; that of showing that the practice is morally permissible despite the fact that it will disadvantage some sub-groups of the unenhanced.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the audience at The II International Workshop in Practical Ethics: Bioethics and Human Enhancement, University of Granada for helpful discussion of the ideas in this paper. Special thanks to Thomas Douglas, Lee John Whittington and two referees for this journal for helpful comments on early drafts of this paper.