

Moral Enhancement, Gnosticism, and Some Philosophical Paradoxes

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Abstract: This article examines the concept of moral enhancement from two different perspectives. The first is a bottom-up approach, which aims at identifying fundamental moral traits and subcapacities as targets for enhancement. The second perspective, a top-down approach, is holistic and in line with virtue ethics. Both perspectives lead to the observation that alterations of material and social conditions are the most reliable means to improve prosocial behavior overall.

Moral enhancement as a preventive measure invokes Gnostic narratives on the allegedly fallen status of human nature, its search for salvation, and the dependence of the laity on heteronomous salvific interventions. The allure of the preventive kind of enhancement is attributable to its religious hues.

Owing to the absence of clarity regarding moral enhancement and of metrics to evaluate its progress, humanity is at risk of prioritizing unclear and unsubstantiated measures of preventive diminishment at the expense of celebrating human capacities and joys.

Keywords: enhancement (moral); virtue ethics; Gnostic religions; moral psychology; evolutionary anthropology

Introduction

Ordinarily, “enhancement” means “betterment.” In this sense, moral enhancement may count as an increase in kind, charitable, and just judgments and actions. Some authors refer to preventive measures, such as immunization, as enhancement.¹ Recently, Ingmar Persson and Jan Savulescu have aimed at a more ambitious project of enhancement, perhaps the most radical one conceivable. Whereas the threat of infectious diseases motivates immunization, fear of the allegedly inevitable Ultimate Harm motivates the pursuance of what they believe to be the only potential cure: moral enhancement.² The greater the fear, the more tolerable the burden of avoidance becomes. This may entail curtailment of freedom, especially the freedom to be optimistic and to take risks while striving for a better future, richer, more adventurous, even in the face of threats and uncertainty.

In this article, I argue that attempts at conceptualizing the moral enhancement of persons are incoherent (i.e., they involve internal logical problems) and inconsistent (i.e., they fail to fit with other received ideas), and that Persson and Savulescu’s modes of reasoning are in line with the dualist ethos of Gnosticism. They have little in common with open-ended, self-confident, dignity-celebrating, and excellence-oriented visions of improvement and growth.

This article is composed of a few steps. First, it offers a comparison between Persson and Savulescu’s project and Gnosticism. Second, the article explores some differences between avoidance- and good-oriented sets of motivations. Third, the article examines critically two different approaches to the conceptualization and standardization of moral enhancement, arguing that current knowledge in psychology, anthropology, and neuroscience is incompatible with a coherent version of moral enhancement. In conclusion, the whole project suffers from an attribution

error that grants excessive weight to internal capacities and processes at the expense of social and environmental circumstances, as determinants of morality, the good and the acceptable life. The triadic combination of this attribution error with avoidant motivation and a lack of conceptual clarity is charged with a bleak view of human nature and an ensuing serious threat to freedom and dignity. Because awareness of these problems is essential for alternative and dignity-oriented narratives and agendas of enhancement, critical attention to Persson and Savulescu's vision of moral enhancement is of utmost relevance.

Persson, Savulescu, and the New Gnosticism

In their book *Unfit for the Future*, Ingmar Persson and Julian Savulescu lay out the following argument:

- 1) Cognitive enhancement and many other technological advances are inevitable.
- 2) Hence, there is an expanding hiatus between humanity's cognitive powers and moral capabilities. In line with Charles Darwin, Persson and Savulescu attribute human evil to the cognitive faculties.³ In search for a corrective balance, they seek to boost humanity's moral faculties.
- 3) The gap between cognitive powers and morality might lead to all sorts of harms, including the possibility of the Ultimate Harm, which is a kind of existence that is not worth living, a world of universal and irreversible misery. Persson and Savulescu maintain that humanity is "unfit for the future."
- 4) Consequently, moral enhancement is a moral imperative.
- 5) Additionally, because the stakes are so high (as a result of the risk of Ultimate Harm), it is reasonable to undertake unusual measures and risks in the process of coping.
- 6) Such measures may include the God Machine, which is a hypothetical brain implant that removes dangerously malicious intents from one's mind, just before it consolidates into an action-guiding mental event.

This narrative strikes a resemblance to the Gnostic religions of late antiquity.⁴ As much as it is possible to make generalizations regarding a loose network of sects, practices, and modes of thinking, it may be said that

- 1) The Gnostics acknowledged civilization's material culture and its achievements.
- 2) They implicitly affirmed a distinction between cognitive and other human capacities on the one hand and special, spiritual virtues on the other.⁵
- 3) They believed that human nature has corrupt elements in it, something akin to what Christianity developed as the doctrine of original sin.
- 4) They beheld worldly life as a kind of dark imprisonment in need of redemptive enlightenment.
- 5) They saw life without salvation as not a pale, neutral mode of existence but an unbearable evil. Without salvation or enlightenment, they believed that we are unfit for the future—worldly and otherworldly alike.
- 6) They held that salvation depends on liberation from the corrupt part of human existence. This liberation is achievable by means of spiritual-moral enlightenment.

Indeed, in both Persson and Savulescu's argumentation and the Gnostic religions, there is a strong metaphysical dualism separating *cognitive* from *moral* faculties. We find the predominance of one side of this dualism profoundly evil and threatening. The only means of resolution is an extreme measure that is both human (the achievement of gnosis or moral enhancement) and heteronomous (communion with the true God or the subjection of the self to the God machine).

The Christian interpretation of original sin suggests an attenuated version of gnostic moral anthropology. Eating from the Tree of Knowledge is akin to cognitive enhancement and the advancements of material culture, whose benefits are outweighed by long-term environmental degradation and the curses of death and misery. Following the fall of mankind, which eroded the goodness in human nature, humans must strive to receive divine grace in order to find redemption from eternal damnation, the Christian analogy to the Ultimate Harm. Persson and Savulescu do not represent cognitive enhancement as sinful and transgressive, but they do believe that the allegedly expanding gap between cognitive and moral powers bodes calamity, and that external intervention is the only and mandatory preventive remedy. In place of divine grace and salvific sacraments, they identify cutting-edge biotechnology, its "epistemological community" and coterie of experts as humanity's priesthood. Persson and Savulescu also follow Gnosticism's division of humanity into the unelected and the enlightened. The former are ordinary people; the latter are composed of a mixture of the faithful (those planning and upholding the enhancement programs) and the enhanced persons. Not only does this attitude pose a serious risk to the values of equality, solidarity, and mutual respect, but it also opens up the possibility that the "faithful" might consider themselves superior to the noncompliant.⁶

If setting limits on a creature counts as enhancement, the creature in question must be regarded as predominantly evil. If such enhancement is mandatory, even at the cost of great risks and burdens, this creature must be regarded as otherwise doomed. Persson and Savulescu seem to share this sinister evaluation of humanity with the Gnostics. But because they do not share with the Gnostics the belief in the redemption of the soul and a transcendental otherworldly source of goodness, Persson and Savulescu are entrapped in a vicious circle. They wish to rely on human biotechnological capacities and political structures in their struggle against the inevitably destructive nature of human technology and politics.

There is an additional difference between the religious narrative and the moral enhancement one. Religion has been offering the ultimate bliss of Heaven and the prospects of good communal life in this world. Persson and Savulescu are preoccupied with avoidance of extreme harm only. Their conceptualization of enhancement does not entail a vision of the good life—not even a presumption of compatibility between avoidance of extreme harms and happiness or flourishing. The universal and fundamental aversion to the Ultimate Harm endows moral enhancement with appearances of conceptual unity and moral urgency. In the next section, I discuss the implications of the invocation of harm prevention as a human motivation.

Prevention and Enhancement

Psychologist Tory Higgins divides human modes of striving into two categories: prevention focus and promotion focus.⁷ Everything done to avoid loss and

displeasure is preventive. If threats do not exist, prevention foci do not exist either.⁸

Whereas Higgins's model addresses modes of striving, we may similarly distinguish between prevention-focused goals and promotion-focused goals. Promotion-focused goals are associated with an open-ended and undetermined vision of human nature and human capabilities of self-fashioning, self-transformation, and self-transcendence. As exemplified by Pico della Mirandola, this streak of visionary thinking is inspired by a sense of human dignity as pride in existing human nature and a sense of a universal entitlement to dare, explore, and create; it is about aspiring to new directions and meanings that are independent of needs, threats, and coping strategies.⁹ A promotion focus motivates us to act because of the good the act is expected to achieve, not because of the harm that might ensue from inaction.

Persson and Savulescu pin down moral enhancement to fear of something much worse than death: the Ultimate Harm. Instead of envisioning perfection, they would endorse anything that is immune from the ultimate harm as better than current reality. Unsurprisingly, in their explication of the term, the alluring, open-ended, and perfection-oriented meanings of enhancement have been lost. Whereas immunization preserves human nature by preventing a change (i.e., contracting an infectious disease), moral enhancement is about a perceived imperative to alter human nature.

Aristotle contends that, whereas character traits might be natural properties of a person (or even of an animal), virtues depend on rational deliberation on the nature of good life.¹⁰ Persson and Savulescu do not look up to conceptions of the good life but establish their enhancement plans on avoidance of the worst world imaginable. Their vocabulary of enhancement is actually a fig leaf covering an agenda of prevention and confinement. Is it possible to conceptualize such betterment or to come up with a program of moral enhancement with a set of specifications indicating what an enhanced person or society might be like? In the next section, we examine this question from two complementary points of view.

Two Approaches to Moral Enhancement

We may divide the notion of moral enhancement into two different approaches. I refer to the first one as the bottom-up strategy. This strategy identifies a biologically based trait or set of traits and targets them for modification. For example, research has found that kind and generous actions are associated with the secretion of oxytocin, which brings forth a sense of elation.¹¹ Hence, higher level of oxytocin and expansion of elation to other morally commendable deeds may count as moral enhancement. The second approach, the top-down one, will envision an ideal society (e.g., the Kingdom of Ends) populated by ideally behaving people and will aim its enhancement efforts at the production of the morally desired personality or set of morally relevant patterns of behavior. In the following subsection I examine the bottom-up approach; in the next, the top-down one.

Bottom-Up Schemes of Moral Enhancement

The bottom-up approach targets what neuroscientists and anthropologists refer to as fundamental moral traits and subcapacities.¹² These traits may be related to motivation, cognition, behavior, or experience. According to cutting-edge science,

these traits or capacities include sympathetic feelings, a primitive sense of right and wrong, a general sense of rules, highly self-conscious shame reactions, and effective self-control (i.e., power of will). However, all morally relevant traits must be “moderate” to allow cultural cultivation and adaptations to a diversity of circumstances.¹³ In Patricia Churchland’s words, the morally capable person must be free from “fixed action patterns.”¹⁴ This flexibility allows culture and self-reflection to integrate all relevant factors and produce a morally desired behavior.¹⁵ The transitions from inhibition to prohibition and from drive to desire are also fundamental to moral judgment and morally commendable conducts.¹⁶

We may observe that none of the aforementioned fundamental traits and subcapacities call for enhancement. The very basic dispositions, such as empathy, are context dependent. Although empathy is a prosocial trait, noncontextualized empathy might be morally wrong; empathy with an evil person might be disastrous.

Persson, Savulescu, and others talk about “targeted interventions” aimed at “countermoral emotions.” Another locus for intervention is MAO-A phenotypes (which are associated with antisocial behavior).¹⁷ Thomas Douglas argues for very highly selective interventions that attenuate the expression of countermoral genes and biochemical pathways in manners that do not affect other traits, for example, reduction in antimoral dispositions such as racist biases.¹⁸ Exposure to the antihypertensive drug propranolol reduces negative race bias.¹⁹

Indeed, boosting prosocial traits seems adaptive. For example, aging female monkeys tend to risk their lives in defense of the group.²⁰ Although the benefits of such altruistic behavior are evident, we cannot infer that a community in which aging humans self-risk for the sake of the young is morally superior to a community that confers extra protection on the frail and that cares for them like needy babies. One needs a moral rather than an adaptive argument in order to justify morally one kind of behavior relative to another. Cognitive biases and rules of thumb might be quite beneficial overall, but they are not always truthful or moral.²¹ A relatively “feminine” trait (i.e., a trait found more commonly and/or more strongly among females), such as altruism, may be compensated for by its relative absence among males. Hence, it may be wrong to expect that spreading gender- or age-specific traits over the rest of the population may be either beneficial socially or worthy of the title “moral enhancement.” Animals and humans tend to use chemicals (e.g., alcohol) and social dynamics (e.g., well-coordinated group behavior) in order to induce certain kinds of behavior.²² Yet there is no reason to suppose that making humans drink and socially coordinate counts as enhancement as such.

Other key moral traits are not primary dispositions of behavior (i.e., they do not produce any specific patterns of perception or behavior) but are secondary meta-traits, such as a sense of rules and shame reactions. If the existing rules and standards of shame fit a moral order, enhancement of such traits might be beneficial. Alas, if the rules and the code of honor in a certain context are immoral, then enhancement of such dispositions will undermine, rather than promote, morality.²³ Additionally, perhaps we should read racist biases not as primary traits but as cultural constructions that rely on race, the generic biological root of which is a disposition to seek similarities in others to oneself, rather than to any particular trait such as race.²⁴

Philosophers have described the unvirtuous as lacking in constancy, shifting easily from one position to another, and being prone to *akrasia* (weakness of will) and distraction.²⁵ However, unless one can judge the probity of action independently of considerations of character, it might be impossible to tell the waywardness of

the unvirtuous from the flexibility required for genuine moral judgment and action. Moreover, because apparently irrational dispositions may serve rational purposes,²⁶ it is also possible that increases in “rationality” and constancy of behavior might undermine substantial moral goals. If we distinguish morally relevant capacities (e.g., memory, identity, and communication skills) from morality (i.e., the capacity to form a certain kind of judgment and to act on this judgment even against strong interests and motivational sets), we will realize that the enhancement of morally relevant capacities is not identical to moral enhancement. Such enhancement of capacities may actually erode moral judgment and behavior, especially in unusual and complex circumstances.

Although one significant dimension of morality is sociability, we have to keep in mind that virtuous sociability depends on participation in a moral community. A person growing up among thieves and thugs will not be able to be both sociable and moral. Indeed, one key feature of human morality is the capacity to discern moral truths that others fail to see and to stand in defiance of society and its standards. If we cherish the moral character of luminaries such as Abraham, Socrates, and Jesus, we must also appreciate their courage to dissent, perplex, and pose challenges. Had the Athenians been able to enhance Socrates morally, and the Pharisees to enhance Jesus, and had both been rendered more cooperative and sociable, history would have been quite different. Indeed, one additional risk associated with any plan of enhancement is the perpetuation of the prevailing social order at the expense of openness to social reform and cultural changes. When we target the enhancement of speed, we have an independent yardstick by which it would be possible to tell whether an athletically enhanced person actually performs better. We do not have any similar means to assess the success of moral enhancement. The content of such a program and its quality control will be in the eyes of the beholder. Hence, when people talk about moral enhancement, they project their own moral ideals on themselves and others.

To illustrate this argument about the meaninglessness and danger of bottom-up agendas of enhancement, let us revisit empathy. Generosity and care are two behavioral dispositions that empathy is expected to produce. Yet generosity may bring forth two contrasting behaviors: care for one’s kin and care for strangers. If we have to choose between a communitarian commitment to our kin and a universal solidarity with the neediest, enhancement of empathy may exacerbate rather than solve the problem. Leading theories in moral psychology trace key moral controversies to different modes of balancing fundamental psychomoral dispositions (e.g., universal fairness versus group loyalty).²⁷ There is no scientific reason to believe that one kind of balance is superior to any other.

Perhaps the real question is whether or not the future bodes scarcity. If we have reasons to believe that famine is approaching, we are justified in giving priority to ourselves at the expense of others. This judgment is borne out well by Hume’s supposition that justice depends on two circumstantial conditions: a modicum of generosity and mild scarcity.²⁸ Whereas boosting generosity in conditions of scarcity might lead to self-harm, and boosting self-care in conditions of abundance might be cruel, the safest tract for moral improvement seems to be an increase in the resources available overall. This direction calls for technology, for cognitive enhancement in terms of perspective taking and coping with uncertainty, rather than for direct intervention in what we refer to as moral traits.²⁹

The challenge of scarce resources also calls for a reexamination of humanity's capacity to assess reality and its risk-related activities. If we improve our capacity to predict future availability of vital resources, then we will be able to know the morally acceptable price of technology and cognitive enhancement. Because each of these skills reflects on others (e.g., judgment regarding the availability of resources bears on altruism), discrete acts of moral enhancement are unlikely to save us from the Ultimate Harm; rather, they are more likely to bring us closer to this calamity. The properties at stake are cognitive. The better our risk-taking capacity is, and the better our reality judgment is, and the better our innovative and organizational capacities are, the more likely we are to avoid the Ultimate Harm.

If morality is reducible to strategies of coping, we do not have any additional or independent perspective to answer such questions and to determine whether we need moral enhancement in the first place. After all, it is also possible that the current situation, the actual levels of pollution, degradation, and existential insecurities is the best of all possible worlds; a better alternative is unattainable.

Research has shown that when judges decide parole cases immediately after they eat, they are twice as likely to grant parole as when deciding cases before eating.³⁰ Neither this nor any other study tells us the preferred state of mind for handing down parole judgments—belly full or belly empty.³¹ We now have to decide which kind of judgment is morally superior—the stricter or the lenient. (Often, judgment that is strict in regard to one party, the prisoner, is lenient with another party, past and potential victims, for example.) However, we do not know whether to conduct this second-order deliberation with a full or empty belly. This endless regression undermines attempts at conceptualizing bottom-up enhancement.

Suppose we know the optimal conditions for handing down judgments. We then have to decide which interference is superior—external (e.g., give judges more food or make them fast on the days of judgment) or internal (e.g., cause hungry judges to rule as if they were satiated, or vice versa). Put in other words, if we shift the focus of enhancement from actions (e.g., parole decisions) to personalities (e.g., the personality character of parole judges), we have to determine which is the better judge—the satiated (e.g., King Solomon) or the ascetic (e.g., Jesus). This is a question of character and identity, of virtue, not of specific dispositions and patterns of behavior. It is a question of choice and creativity, rather than performance according to predetermined metrics of right and wrong.

The remainder of the article tackles these two difficulties in the conceptualization of moral enhancement. I first explore the holistic, top-down approach, which aims at personalities rather than discrete traits, and then discuss the tension between external and internal interventions.

Top-Down Schemes of Moral Enhancement

A top-down approach to moral enhancement will behold the human agent as a moral black box whose input is the circumstances and whose output is his moral judgment and conduct. What would be the specifications of this black box, and who will judge whether the black box works well or fails expectations? Consider a few stock moral problems, such as abortion of an embryo afflicted with a genetic disease, disconnecting incurable patients from life support, and an altruistic donation

of a kidney. If certain people are responsible for the programming of the black box of moral enhancement, they might endorse refrainment from abortion and euthanasia and donation of a kidney. This will render moral enhancement an enterprise of behavioral cloning in which people project on others the personality traits and modes of behavior they endorse.

Suppose we enhance persons so they conform better with stock consensus maxims, such as “help innocent persons as long as the price of such actions for yourself or others is reasonably proportionate.” We then may wish to observe how such morally enhanced persons behave in morally controversial situations such as abortion of fetuses affected with disability. One may even suggest that if the morally enhanced person chooses to abort, then abortion (at least in similar cases) must be moral, even though many unenhanced persons fail to see this. Alternatively, if the morally enhanced person refrains from abortion, we will infer that abortion is immoral. This mode of reasoning reminds us of the noncodifiability versions of virtue ethics, according to which it is impossible to formulate rules and principles that match behaviors with situations. We have to observe the conduct of virtuous people in order to learn how to behave.³² In a similar vein, if we consider a morally enhanced person virtuous, we may wish to learn from him or her when (if at all) abortion is moral. Other than trusting the conduct of the morally enhanced persons, we will have no other way of verifying the probity of their behavior. This will bring forth the abandonment of ordinary moral deliberation and judgment in favor of emulation of supposedly enhanced persons.

Imagine a hypothetical scale of innocence. The innocent person causes the least harm overall. To enhance humans along the scale of innocence implies the reduction of their appetites and fears. A person whose humility has been morally enhanced will be content with fewer material goods such as food and clothes and will be highly averse to violence, even in the face of possible danger. He will lead a mendicant life. He will turn the other cheek. Imagine also a hypothetical scale of social activism. A person whose activism has been morally enhanced will be strongly motivated to take action and better the world. She will mobilize enormous amounts of resources in order to fight oppression, build hospitals, produce food, and thus improve the lives of millions. In which direction—the humble or the active—should enhancement go? On one hand, humble persons are much less likely to push humanity in the direction of the Ultimate Harm; on the other hand, humanity might depend on moral activists in order to save itself from the recklessness of the unenhanced.

The notion of moral enhancement implodes in several paradoxes. In the first, the God Machine embodies a hyperactive agenda of enhancement whose aim is the enhancement of humility. In the second, because taking moral enhancement in a misguided direction (e.g., humility versus activism) might accelerate the catastrophe rather than prevent it, cognitive enhancement (knowledge of the proper direction) is a prerequisite for moral enhancement that will save us from the growing gap between cognitive and moral powers. The third paradox is this: even though selective breeding is a very effective and quite simple method for enhancement of specific traits, common morality is strongly disposed against it. It is tantamount to eugenics, which is considered to violate human dignity and human rights. The fourth paradox is specific to the top-down approach. According to this approach, the gold standard of moral conduct is the enhanced persons’ conduct. It follows that we will entrust the design, execution, and quality control of this gold standard to unenhanced persons, who are also committed to emulate the role modeling of

our own creations. The fifth paradox is about the hierarchy of values. Because Persson and Savulescu's vision of moral enhancement subjugates fulfillment, happiness, creativity, freedom, and open-endedness to an impersonal project of prevention, we arrive at a situation in which ultimate goals become subordinate to inferior ones. Altogether, moral reasoning is transformed into an oracle (i.e., wait and see what the enhanced person does) whose only known value is catastrophe prevention, not the good or best possible life.

Integrative Conclusion: Moral Enhancement as an Attribution Error

In another publication I have argued that even though it might be possible to enhance specific human traits (such as speed and longevity), such enterprises cannot be considered as the enhancement of the human being. Because the inherent value of each and every person, his or her human dignity, is independent of any function or purpose the human may perform, there is no reason to suppose that a tall person is better than a shorter one, or a fast person more enhanced than a slow one.³³ Because every person is expected to be moral, one might suggest that enhancing people morally would conform to the values of human dignity and visions of the good life. However, in this article I have argued that modification of morally relevant traits is not equivalent to the moral enhancement of the person, and that, in the absence of metrics for moral judgment and behavior, every attempt at enhancing people is explicable only in terms of projecting one's values and desired character traits on others. The enhancement of traits comes at the expense of complementary ones, and the enhancement of any disposition comes at the expense of a psychological flexibility that is a moral subcapacity in its own right. Morality entails both the cultivation of sociability and the readiness to rise against culture and society, often in defiance of the odds and of common knowledge.

We all know that circumstances influence behavior. In times of scarcity, people tend to be less generous to strangers; in the absence of personal security, people tend to be less trusting of one another. Some philosophers and psychologists even promote the idea that circumstances predicate behavior much more than does personal character.³⁴ Virtue ethics aims at consistent moral personalities whose behavior is appropriate to the circumstances, not determined by them.³⁵ Prosocial behavior is more justified and moral conduct is easier as circumstances become increasingly hospitable and auspicious. Indeed, endeavors to alter humans' material and social environment may count as a sort of moral enhancement. Major projects of public health, industry, agrarian technology, social welfare, and justice might have contributed to moral behavior to a greater degree than any program directed at human genetics and physiology could ever achieve. One noteworthy example is the precipitous decline in the rate of homicide from the premodern era to the contemporary welfare state.³⁶ If it is possible to achieve moral perfection (or any other standard of moral life) by means of biological manipulation (bioenhancement) and without commitment to a certain vision of material and social order, it will be possible to transform a gulag into a utopia, merely by programming the prisoners to moral perfection and personal contentment that fit their given conditions.

Psychologist Lee Ross coined the term "fundamental attribution error" to describe overemphasis of factors internal to the agent (such as psychology and genetics) at the expense of circumstantial factors in the determination of human behavior.³⁷ Opinions vary regarding the validity of the distinction between internal and

external factors and about the proper balance between them. Yet it seems that the moral enhancement discourse commits a fundamental attribution error in believing that biomedical enhancement will produce consistent and stable outcomes, and that interventions at the level of the individual human organism are the (only or best) means to avert social problems and man-made catastrophes.

If we alter (or “enhance”) the given human condition (e.g., marked increase of longevity, asexual procreation, capacity to digest grass and leaves, survivability in degraded environments), moral visions will change, always stretching our imagination as much as our finitudes allow us. If prevention of the Ultimate Harm is our key preoccupation, there are good reasons to suppose that the most promising direction is reduction in capacities rather than their enhancement. If our most ambitious projects are motivated by fear of Ultimate Harm and eternal damnation, we downplay, even forget, the freedom to create, choose, enjoy, and take risks in the contexts of dreams worth spinning. Indeed, some would argue that morality calls for opting for a life of freedom and creativity even in the face of impending calamities. For many, celebration of human freedom (at least in the sense of the lack of external interventions), human moral powers, and the open-endedness of human nature is key to their vision of human goods and the good life, even in the face of risk of error and harm. The normative consequences of the error of attribution might be the preventive diminishment of human capacities at the expense of trust, optimism, and hope.

Notes

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15. See note 12, Bloom 2013, at 177.
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25. For example, Lysis, at 214c.
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27. See note 12, Bloom 2013, at 155–81; Tuschman A. *Our Political Nature: The Evolutionary Origins of What Divides Us*. Amherst: Prometheus, 2013. At any rate, racist attitudes involve an intractable mixture of reality judgments (e.g., whether certain ethnicities are smarter or morally better than others) with value judgments (e.g., whether or not certain ethnicities should be treated as equal). Because the campaigns against racism focus on the former (i.e., showing that we are all similar in nature), the enhancement struggle against racism should focus on cognitive, not moral, enhancement.
28. Hume D. *A Treatise on Human Nature*. Vol. II. London: Aldine; 1911, at 200. Many contemporary philosophers subscribe to this presumption as well, for example, Rawls J. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 1971, at 126–30, and Hubin DC. The scope of justice. *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1979;9:3–24.
29. Hall SS. *Wisdom: From Philosophy to Neuroscience*. New York: Knopf; 2010, at chap. 8, 11. Other accounts of practical wisdom contain a mix of seemingly moral dispositions (e.g., empathy) and cognitive capacities (e.g., reliance on heuristics): for example, Schwartz B, Sharpe K. *Practical Wisdom: The Right Way to Do the Right Thing*. New York: Riverhead; 2010, and Peterson P, Seligman MEP. *Character Strength and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2004. Others regard adaptation to social hierarchy and to dense populations as key to survival and flourishing in the post-Neolithic era. Both kinds of adaptations are believed to be cultural rather than biological. Shyrock A, Smail DL. *Deep History: The Architecture of Past and Present*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; 2011, at 264–72.
30. Danziger S, Levav J, Avnaim-Pesso L. Extraneous factors in judicial decisions. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* 2011;108:6889–92.
31. Recidivism rates might serve as an indicator of the prudence of parole. But as long as we do not know whether or not punishment is merely a means of crime prevention, we cannot give an empirical answer to the parole question. Many crimes cannot be controlled for recidivism (e.g., murder of a father).
32. McDowell J. Virtue and reason. *Monist* 1979;62:331–50.
33. See note 9, Barilan 2012, at 138–40.
34. Doris J. *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2002.
35. Kamteker R. Situationism and virtue ethics on the content of our character. *Ethics* 2004;114: 458–91.
36. See, for example, Ruff JR. *Violence in Early Modern Europe: 1500–1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2001, at 131–40; Eisner M. Modernization, self-control and lethal violence: The long term dynamics of European homicide rates in theoretical perspective. *British Journal of Criminology* 2001;41:618–38.
37. Harman G. Moral philosophy meets social psychology: Virtue ethics and the fundamental attribution error. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 1999;99:315–531.