

Philosophy 90 (Basic Problems in Philosophy): Making Better People
Fall 2015

Professor Don Rutherford
TTh 12:30-1:50

The once mythic prospect of the enhancement of human physical and mental powers is quickly becoming a reality. We now have the ability to change our brain chemistry and the expression of our genes in ways that promise to make us smarter, stronger, and even more ethical. The availability of enhancement technologies raises a host of philosophical questions that we will examine in this course. Does biomedical enhancement represent a fundamental departure from other ways (e.g. improved living standards, education) of making people better off? Ought there to be restrictions on what kind of biomedical enhancements people are allowed to pursue? Is the option of biomedical enhancement for those who can afford it likely to reinforce the inequality among human beings, making it objectionable on grounds of justice? Is biomedical enhancement leading us beyond what is recognizable as a human life (toward the “transhuman”), and if so, is that something about which we should be concerned?

The goal of the course is to approach these questions from the perspective of philosophical theories about human well-being. If biomedical enhancement is likely to become part of many people’s lives, it is essential to understand how it can, and possibly cannot, make us better off than we would otherwise be.

There are no prerequisites for the course; no background in philosophy is assumed.

Texts:

Allen Buchanan, *Better than Human: The Promise and Perils of Enhancing Ourselves* (Princeton, 2012)

Julian Savulescu and Nick Bostrom (eds.), *Human Enhancement* (Oxford, 2009)