

**Philosophy 90: Basic Problems in Philosophy  
Making Better People**

**Fall 2015**

Professor Don Rutherford

Center 220  
TuTh 12:30-1:50

Office hours: TuTh 2-3pm, or by app't (HSS 8046)

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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 kinds 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 of 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.

**I. Texts:**

Allen Buchanan, *Better than Human: The Promise and Perils of Enhancing Ourselves* (Princeton, 2012). Available via UC San Diego’s Roger catalog as EBL online monograph, or on Amazon in hardback for \$14.94.

All other readings will be made available on the class TED site.

**II. Assignments and Grading (100% total)**

1. Two takehome exams due at 11:59 pm, Sunday, October 11 (15%) and Sunday, November 15 (25%). Submit to turnitin.com on TED site.

2. 15-minute class presentation during weeks 8-10 on a relevant topic of your choosing (20%).
3. Final paper, 7-10 pp., developing presentation topic, due in final exam period (30%).
4. Participation (10%)

### III. Other Important Information

- Regular attendance and completion of the required reading ahead of class are critical. Engagement with the course presupposes that you have done the assigned reading and are prepared to discuss it in class.
- Use of computers and other electronic devices is allowed in class for legitimate pedagogical purposes, **not for web surfing or personal communications**. In general, you should remain as focused on the content of the class as possible.
- If accommodations are needed for a disability or for religious reasons, please discuss the matter with me as soon as possible.
- Extensions will only be given to those who present evidence of a valid excuse in a timely manner. Note that computer or printer failure does **not** usually constitute a valid excuse, so be sure to take all necessary precautions to safeguard your work (backup, backup, backup!). If at any time you believe you have a legitimate claim to an extension, bring it to my attention as soon as possible (e.g., if you are going to be out of town for a legitimate purpose, such as a university-sponsored concert performance, athletic event, conference, or the equivalent). Unexcused late exams or papers will be penalized the equivalent of one +/- letter grade per day.
- Students should familiarize themselves with the UCSD Policy on Integrity of Scholarship: <http://students.ucsd.edu/academics/academic-integrity/policy.html>. There is a zero-tolerance policy on plagiarism in this class. If you are pressed for time or blocked, it is **always** better to talk with me and to take the late penalty if necessary, than to submit work that is not your own. All written work will be submitted to turnitin.com, so there is a very high probability that plagiarism will be detected. Anyone who is found to plagiarize work will receive an automatic F for the course. Additional disciplinary penalties may be assigned by the UCSD administration. Receipt of this syllabus constitutes an acknowledgement that you are responsible for understanding and acting in accordance with UCSD guidelines on academic integrity.

#### IV. Schedule of Classes

##### Week 0

Th 9/24 Introduction

##### Week 1

Tu 9/29 Buchanan, *Better than Human*, chaps. 1-2

Th 10/1 Buchanan, *Better than Human*, chap. 3

##### Week 2

Tu 10/6 Buchanan, *Better than Human*, chaps. 4-5

Th 10/8 Buchanan, *Better than Human*, chaps. 6-7

##### Week 3 Enhancement: Against and For

Tu 10/13 Michael Sandel, "The Case Against Perfection" (*The Atlantic*, 2004)  
The President's Council on Bioethics, *Beyond Therapy* (2003, pp. 309-40)

Th 10/15 John Harris, "Enhancements are a Moral Obligation" (in *Human Enhancement*, ed. Savulescu and Bostrom, chap. 6)

##### Week 4 Enhancement and Eugenics

Tu 10/20 Nicholas Agar, "Liberal Eugenics" (*Public Affairs Quarterly*, 1998)  
Julian Savulescu, "Procreative Beneficence: Why We Should Select the Best Embryos" (*Bioethics*, 2001)

Th 10/22 Rebecca Bennett, "The Fallacy of the Principle of Procreative Beneficence" (*Bioethics*, 2008)  
Robert Sparrow, "A Not-so-new Eugenics: Harris and Savulescu on Human Enhancement" (*Hastings Center Report*, 2011)

##### Week 4 Enhancement and Justice (weekend assignment: watch *Gattaca*)

Tu 10/27 Allen Buchanan, et al., "Genes, Justice, and Human Nature" (in *From Chance to Choice*, 2001)

Th 10/29 Julian Savulescu, "Justice, Fairness, and Enhancement" (*Annals N. Y. Academy of Sciences*, 2006)

##### Week 6 Enhancing Moral Agency

Tu 11/3 Ingmar Persson and Julian Savulescu, "The Perils of Cognitive Enhancement and the Urgent Imperative to Enhance the Moral Character of Humanity" (*Journal of Applied Ethics*, 2008)  
Thomas Douglas, "Moral Enhancement" (*Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 2008)

Th 11/5 Birgit Beck, "Conceptual and Practical Problems of Moral Enhancement" (*Bioethics*, 2015)

Week 7      The Enhancement of Love/Transhumanism  
 (Meetings with DR to discuss presentation topic)

Tu    11/10      Brian Earp, et al., "The Medicalization of Love" (*Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics*, 2015)  
 Matthew Liao, "Parental Love Pills: Some Ethical Considerations" (*Bioethics*, 2011)

Th    11/12      Nick Bostrom, "Transhumanist Values" (*Review of Contemporary Philosophy*, 2005)  
 Nicholas Agar, "Whereto Transhumanism" (*Hastings Center Report*, 2007)

Week 8      Class Presentations  
 Tu    11/17  
 Th    11/19

Week 9      Class Presentations  
 Tu    11/24  
 Th    11/26      No Class-Thanksgiving Holiday

Week 10     Class Presentations  
 Tu    12/1  
 Th    12/3

Final Exam (final paper due)  
 F    12/11 11:30 am-2:30 pm