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Venter, Lucas

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Moral Enhancement and Personal Autonomy

Lucas Venter

8703294P

Abstract

In this thesis, I examine the extent to which moral enhancement, the biomedical alteration of an individual's disposition to act according to good or bad motives, will influence his capacity for self-governance. Following a discussion of the salient features of moral enhancement, a plausible list of conditions against which to measure the compatibility of moral enhancement with personal autonomy is expounded. The core elements of moral enhancement are weighed against these conditions in order to establish the ways in which these core elements are compatible with the conditions of personal autonomy.

I argue that moral enhancement need not lead to a diminishment of personal autonomy, provided it serves merely as a mechanism to help an agent overcome the deterministic limitations that prevent him from bringing his lower-order desires into conformity with the higher-order desires that he has arrived at through independent, thoughtful deliberation.