

Superhuman Meaningful Pastimes for the Everyday Cyborg

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Declaration

I, Julie Dawn Reid hereby declare that this research report (Title: “Superhuman Meaningful Pastimes for the Everyday Cyborg”) is my own unaided work. No part of this research report has been submitted in the past or is being submitted for an award at any other university.

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Abstract

In this report I argue that one of the ways in which it is possible for a person to be capable of more meaningful achievements and to engage in more meaningful activities is to become a cyborg. Cyborgs have enhanced abilities as a result of implants that connect the brain to mechanical prostheses or other additions such as synthetic muscles or skin. I argue that activities and achievements are meaningful in virtue of developing or expressing what is most admirably ‘human’ about us and that many cybernetic enhancements allow for the substantial development or expression of our valuably human capacities. Since I suspect that there would be considerable resistance to the idea that becoming a cyborg could contribute meaning to a life, I spend a substantial amount of space to responding to possible objections to my account. I argue that cybernetic enhancements need not threaten the development of virtues or other skills, or eliminate effort or suffering. They also need not make us other than what we are to such an extent that the meaningfulness they make possible is undermined. Furthermore, the meaningfulness enhancements can contribute to lives need not be undermined by ethical considerations, or by the common intuition that meaningfulness depends on how one responds within the circumstances presented to one, not the abilities that one has.

Introduction

In this paper I argue that becoming a cyborg and thereby increasing the amount of meaningful activities and achievements one is capable of is one way in which one can increase the meaningfulness of one's life. I do not claim that *all* enhancements increase meaningfulness of a life: only certain enhancements do and only when used in certain ways. I argue that meaningful activities and achievements are those that develop and express what is most admirably human about us, namely our capacities for rational thought and certain emotion, and that cybernetic enhancements allow us to develop and express these capacities by allowing us to engage in more activities that make their expression and development possible. In order to show that this is plausible I defend the claim that increasing the amount of meaningful parts that a life contains can increase the meaningfulness of a life, as well as show why certain consequences of becoming enhanced do not undermine meaningfulness.

In Chapter One I introduce the main question that I consider in this paper, namely, whether cybernetic enhancements can increase the meaningfulness of a life by making possible a greater amount and variety of meaningful achievements and activities. I also introduce the concepts "cyborg" and "meaningfulness" and argue that the concept of meaningfulness is not unintelligible. I then clarify some important distinctions that are commonly made in the field of meaning of life and argue briefly that an objectivist naturalist approach is at least substantially plausible. Lastly I defend the method of

appealing to intuition that I use to make claims about meaning. In Chapter Two I distinguish between meaningful achievements and meaningful activities and consider which kinds of achievements and activities count as meaningful. I present a rough “theory of meaning” that tries to capture what it is in virtue of which achievements and activities are meaningful. I then use this to suggest how one might go about assessing the meaningfulness of particular activities and achievements and argue that the theory entails that cybernetic enhancements would provide more meaning in life if used in certain ways. Lastly I consider whether the “aggregative view” (according to which increasing the amount of meaningful parts of a life can increase the sum total of meaning), which my account embraces, is plausible and what kind of role factors such as order of events play in the meaningfulness of a life.

The last four chapters all consider possible objections to my thesis. In Chapter Three I consider the objection that enhancements cannot contribute meaning to life because they do not allow for the development of virtues and skills, and because they eliminate aspects of experience such as effort and suffering. This includes making the claim that eliminating effort and certain internal goods does not result in a great loss of meaning since these are only instrumentally meaningful, as well as considering whether effort and these internal goods would in fact be eliminated from a person’s life by her becoming enhanced. In Chapter Four I focus on the perception that enhancements are like tools, and cyborgs like machines. I consider the objection that since getting enhanced is akin to using tools, the achievements and activity carried out as a result of being enhanced are not properly attributable to the cyborg. According to this objection, enhancements would

not increase meaning in a life because a person must be responsible for activities and achievements if they are to contribute meaning to her life. I argue that responsibility is not necessary for meaning to accrue to a life in all cases, and that in any case becoming enhanced need not compromise one's responsibility for the activities and achievements made possible by enhancements. Next I consider the objection that enhancements would not increase or only slightly increase meaning in a life because they pose a threat to identity. I consider various ways in which it may be thought that our identity could be threatened by becoming a cyborg and show that none of these need mean that I should give up my thesis. In Chapter Five I discuss some of the dangers to society that may result from people becoming cyborgs, as well as the ethical implications of becoming a cyborg and developing cybernetic technology and whether these would prevent activities or achievements made possible by enhancements from counting as meaningful. Lastly, in Chapter Six, I consider the claim that cyborgs will not have more meaningful lives by acquiring more capabilities because deaf people do not have less meaningful lives by *excluding* certain capabilities. I argue that while deaf people need not have less meaningful lives than hearing people, this does not imply that cyborgs cannot have more meaningful lives as a result of getting enhancements. I conclude that becoming a cyborg is one way in which the meaningfulness of one's life can be increased.

Chapter One

Cyborgs and Meaning

Philosophers with widely varying views (for example, both theists and atheists) hold that one of the ways in which a life can be meaningful is by including certain activities or achievements. In this report I argue that one of the ways that it is possible for a person to be capable of more meaningful achievements and to engage in more meaningful activities is to undergo cybernetic enhancement: i.e. to become a cyborg.

“Cyborg” is short for “cybernetic organism”: an entity that is a “synthesis of organic and synthetic parts”.¹ Cyborgs are organisms with enhanced abilities as a result of implants that use synthetic feedback mechanisms² to connect the brain to mechanical prostheses and other artificial additions such as synthetic muscles. The possibilities of cybernetic enhancement have been explored at length in science fiction novels such as *Blade Runner* by Philip K. Dick and movies such as *Emoflex*. For example, in *Emoflex* one of the characters gets hand prostheses in place of her feet in order to be more agile, which is required in her attempts to infiltrate the headquarters of the ruling party that she believes is murdering innocents. However, technological improvements today provide reason to believe that these kinds of ideas may shortly be instantiated in the real world. For

¹ “Cyborg,” available at < <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyborg>>.

² “Cyborg”.

example, Kevin Warwick, British scientist and professor of cybernetics at the University of Reading, has succeeded in manipulating a robotic arm in another room by transmitting impulses via electrons inserted into his own arm, and translated through a computer to the robotic arm.³

Artificial implants have become commonly used in medicine, for example “joint replacements, heart valves, plastic blood vessels, insulin pumps, synthetic skin, artificial blood, even polymermetal muscles...[and] wires that stimulate optic and auditory nerves”⁴ that have permitted improved eyesight and allowed deaf people to hear respectively. In this paper when I talk of cybernetic enhancement I will not be talking about restorative uses of technology, although it might well be argued that these interventions can make a life more meaningful, especially ones that involve restoring sight or hearing. In fact if my argument works, it seems to imply that meaning will increase in these cases. I will focus on cybernetic enhancements rather than repair of limbs: for example, more strength and coordination in the hand with the help of synthetic muscle grafts, extra limbs and maybe even strange attachments like tails or wings. Similarly I will consider enhancement and not restoration of organs, for example, telescopic or x-ray vision; and the brain, for example, digital implanted memory recorders. Significant improvements in cybernetics suggest that these kinds of enhancements will be possible at some point in the future. However, even if it turns out that certain cybernetic enhancements are impossible, it remains revealing for how we conceptualize the meaningful life to consider the possibility that they are not.

³ W. Underhill, “Merging Man and Machine,” *Newsweek* 140 (2002): p. 38.

⁴ “The Bionic Connection,” *Discover* 23 (2002): p. 493.

The “Meaningful Life”

The questions, “What is the meaning of life?” or “What counts as a meaningful life?” are notoriously difficult to answer. For one, the terminology is misleading, or at least confusing: we tend to think of “meaning” in the context of language, that is, in terms of reference, but it is not this sense that the word has in these questions. One of the ways that philosophers in the past have denied that the question of what constitutes or adds meaning to life is a legitimate one deserving attention is by arguing that statements about life’s meanings are not well-formed propositions. One reason for believing this is that to be “meaningful” is to be a symbol, and life is not something that can be meaningful since it is not a symbol.⁵ However, there is no reason to think that all senses of a word have the same properties: for example not all senses of the word “fire” need include the concept of heat – as in the case where to fire someone from a job is to terminate their employment. Similarly, talk of meaning of life need not include the property of symbolism, especially if it is remembered that inter-changeable phrases such as “significant existence” and “life that matters” do not include such a property.⁶

Another reason why the question of what contributes meaning to life does not seem to be unintelligible is that most people have fairly strong intuitions about what is and is not

⁵ Thaddeus Metz, “Recent Work on Meaning of Life,” *Ethics* 112 (2002): p. 801.

⁶ Metz, “Recent Work on Meaning of Life,” p. 801.

capable of making a life meaningful. For example, many feel that the lives of Plato, Mandela and Picasso are clearly meaningful, whereas the lives of people who do not do anything to help or connect with others and those who dedicate their lives to worthless activities are not meaningful, or at least substantially less meaningful than they could be. Clearly a person whose life is dedicated to finding the cure for cancer but who does not use this discovery to help others, and instead burns all evidence of research on completion, will lack meaning for that reason, and the life of someone with no close relationships lacks the meaning that lives that do have these kinds of relationships have. For an example of the kind of life that is clearly lacking in meaning by being dedicated to worthless activity W. D. Joske points to the life of the school master in the novel, *The Incorruptibles* by Guthrie Wilson, which is dedicated to parsing and analysing sentences.⁷ While I will not be considering the question of when a life is meaningful on the whole, I will be considering how parts of a life can make it more meaningful. Almost all accounts of the meaningful life take a life to be meaningful because it is made up of meaningful parts,⁸ and my paper will be examining accounts that focus on activity and achievement as one major meaningful part.

In this paper I am more concerned with the question, “What counts as a meaningful life?”, than the question, “What is the meaning of life?” I take the latter to ask whether human life as a species has a meaning, or greater purpose, while the former asks merely whether, and as a result of which features, individual human lives can be meaningful.

This distinction is important, and I will be assuming, with others, that individual lives can

⁷ W. D. Joske, “Philosophy and the Meaning of Life,” in E. D. Klemke, ed., *The Meaning of Life*, second edition (Oxford University Press, New York, 2000), p. 287.

⁸ Metz, “Recent Work on Meaning of Life,” p. 783.

be meaningful even if human life as a whole has no meaning.⁹ Thus I will not address the question of the meaningfulness of the human race or the universe as a whole at all.

If we take meaningfulness to be an unanalyzable quality (such as tasting salty),¹⁰ then discussion of meaning becomes difficult. This is because it is not clear whether this unanalyzable quality is perceivable, and, if it is, then the question arises of who can be trusted to have detected it. It is difficult to imagine what an appropriate “meaning locater” would be like, and without one it becomes very difficult to resolve disputes on which lives lack or contain meaning. However, it does seem possible for meaningfulness to be understood in terms of other concepts that we are more familiar with. When we say that an individual life is “meaningful” we seem to be saying that such a life includes certain features or patterns that are particularly worth admiration and connect with what is exceptionally valuable. Extraordinary scientific discoveries, philanthropic work and artistic endeavours are generally considered meaningful and are all examples (among others) of what we particularly admire.

A common understanding of the content of the notion of a “meaningful life” is that the term is applicable to those who have striven for and achieved the proper kinds of goals- i.e. meaning in life comes from achieving certain purposes. However, it is not possible to reduce talk of meaning to talk of purposes since, as Thaddeus Metz notes, such a theory implausibly excludes as theories of meaning the views that argue that meaning can be

⁹ Thaddeus Metz, “New Developments in the Meaning of Life,” *Philosophy Compass* 2 (2007): p. 211.

¹⁰ Metz, “Recent Work on Meaning of Life,” p. 803.

imparted by external, uncontrollable factors such as God.¹¹ While the content of “meaning” is not essentially captured by talk of purposes, having appropriate purposes does seem to be one central way that a life can acquire meaning, and this is a claim widely accepted in the literature.

An objectivist naturalist account of meaning as an appealing view

It seems to me that an objectivist and naturalist view fits well with many of our strong intuitions about meaning. I have no space to defend this claim in detail here, and it is not necessary for my project that I do, but I will defend it briefly, since the objectivist/subjectivist and naturalist/supernaturalist distinctions are important distinctions in the field.

On a subjectivist view of meaning, something is meaningful because it is the object of a pro-attitude of someone: for example, because it is desired and esteemed by someone. I find this kind of view of meaningfulness (and of value) implausible. A simple reason why I think it implausible is that on this view all manner of things that we generally take not to be valuable or meaningful would turn out to be valuable or meaningful if they were the object of a pro-attitude of someone¹², for example rape, or filling, emptying and refilling a bottle with water, and this seems absurd.

¹¹ Metz, “Recent Work on Meaning of Life,” p. 802.

¹² Metz, “New Developments in the Meaning of Life,” p. 203.

Intuitively most people think that some of the things that contribute meaning to life are loving relationships, achievements, actions, and creativity. Furthermore, it is common to think that only *certain* relationships, actions and achievements and creative endeavours add meaning, and people who think this are objectivists about meaning. For objectivists about meaning it is not the case that achieving just anything, as long as it is deemed meaningful by the achiever (for example, buying every single packet of popcorn on the shelf in the supermarket, for no greater purpose), will add meaning to one's life. Objectivists about meaning think that meaning is not dependent solely on mental states, i.e. evaluating something as meaningful and engaging in it as a result is not sufficient to contribute meaning to one's life, even though evaluating something as meaningful may contribute some meaning if what is engaged in and evaluated as meaningful really is meaningful. For instance, Susan Wolf argues that meaning in life is constituted by loving what is objectively worthy of love (which only includes some projects and conditions), so that "If there is nothing [objectively valuable that] we love or are able to love, a meaningful life is not open to us".¹³ However, it seems to me that one does not necessarily need to love a project in order for it to count as a meaningful one (for example, the scientist need not love discovering the cure for cancer for it to contribute meaning to his life – he may even detest cancer patients and the work that was necessary in discovering the cure): that is, one need not recognize the significance of objectively meaningful factors in one's life in order for them to contribute to the meaningfulness of one's life, although in some cases recognition can add some meaning.

¹³ Susan Wolf, "The True, the Good, and the Lovable," in Sarah Buss and Lee Overton, eds., *Contours of Agency – Essays on Themes from Harry Frankfurt* (London: The MIT Press: 2002): p. 237.

I move on now to supernaturalist/naturalist views on meaning. Supernaturalists believe that a meaningful life is impossible without the existence of some kind of supernatural realm towards which an individual relates properly, while naturalists believe that a meaningful life is possible in a purely physical world, i.e. in the world that can be known with the five senses. My sympathies lie with a naturalist perspective since I think that many clear cases of meaningful lives would not lose their meaning if it turned out that the people in question did not possess souls, or that God did not exist. For example, Mahatma Gandhi's accomplishments seem to me to be no less meaningful if we assume that God does not exist, or that Gandhi did not have a soul.

The thought of our efforts, of all our activities and achievements, being forgotten and ultimately amounting to nothing serves as a powerful reason for many to think that meaning in life is impossible if all that exists is the physical universe. This explains the appeal of a God centred view that holds that God is key to a meaningful life, since an all-good and all-powerful God would ensure that our experiences and those of our loved ones are immortalized in his unified memory,¹⁴ and thus avoid the loss of meaning that the destruction of the physical world appears to herald. Similarly, many people think that a soul is necessary for meaningfulness because they think that the meaningful life must be worth living, and if a life is to be worth living, then it must have more value than is possible from a finite life, which can only make a finite difference to the world.¹⁵

However, again there seems to be many examples of lives that are worth living (for example those that promote human welfare, or achieve human excellence), even if their

¹⁴ Metz, "Recent Work on Meaning of Life," p. 788.

¹⁵ Metz, "Recent Work on Meaning of Life," pp. 788-789.

impact and value is only finite. Even if Nelson Mandela's life was finite and even if one day all memory of him will be destroyed, it seems nonetheless that he had a meaningful and worthwhile life, just because of what he achieved in his lifetime, and because he engaged in meaningful activities, such as working for justice and uniting people.

Since subjectivism and supernaturalism are problematic for at least the reasons listed above, I will be assuming an objectivist naturalist perspective for the rest of the paper.

Some Important Distinctions

One way of clarifying what it is we are talking about when we talk about the meaningful life is to contrast it with other types of lives. Most philosophers on meaning of life consider meaningfulness of life to be “a fundamental normative category that is distinct from welfare and morality”,¹⁶ so that the meaningful life is particularly worth pursuing for reasons other than the pleasure it may bring, and is not the kind of life that one analytically has a moral duty to pursue. I take meaning to be a type of value analytically distinct from moral value since meaningful activities or elements need not be morally required: for example, composing a beautiful piece of music is intuitively meaningful but not (absent a very peculiar situation) morally obligatory. Similarly, meaningful activities need not promote a person's well-being: sometimes meaningful activities exact a heavy toll on the body and mind, as was the case of the Polish scientist Marie Curie who at

¹⁶ Metz, “Recent Work on Meaning of Life,” p. 782.

times suffered from depression and eventually died of overexposure to radiation, in the process of making discoveries about radioactive substances.

Also on the list of esteemed lives are the worthwhile life and the life that is unreasonable to reject. One way to identify worthwhile lives is that they are those that contain more good than bad.¹⁷ Metz points out that the worthwhile life is conceptually distinct from the meaningful one since the worthwhile life is one that is worth living, that is, that is worth choosing, and some meaningless lives might be worth choosing, for example, life in an experience machine.¹⁸ A meaningful life can similarly be distinguished from a life that is unreasonable to reject, because some lives that are unreasonable to reject (at least in light of available alternatives) are nonetheless meaningless, and again the experience machine example can be used to illustrate the point. This is because it might be unreasonable to reject a life in the experience machine if it made possible for one a large amount of pleasure and interesting experiences (even if these were non-veridical), and negligible pain. In fact, intuitive unease about the experience machine seems to be well explained by the fact that it precludes meaning, since whatever a person experiences within it does not *actually* occur, and actual occurrence of events appears to be a condition for meaningfulness.

Since evaluating meaningfulness of a life is distinct from evaluating the amount of pleasure in a life, the meaningful life can be distinguished from the happy, unreasonable

¹⁷ Metz, "New Developments in the Meaning of Life," p. 213

¹⁸ Metz, "New Developments in the Meaning of Life," p. 213

to reject, and the worthwhile life. Nonetheless, many meaningful lives will in fact be happy, worthwhile and unreasonable to reject.

Method

The concept of the meaningful life is one that we seem to have strong intuitions about, and the use of intuitions can be useful in certain fields, particularly where value is involved. While a feeling of certainty does not seem to tell us much conclusively, it is nonetheless one of the only things we have to go on in attempting to refine what we mean when we talk about the meaningful life. Thus throughout the paper I will be identifying common intuitions as well as what appears to be the best explanations for common intuitions that many people hold in order to try to make some headway in clarifying the notion of the meaningful life. A similar method is adopted in ethics. More specifically, I will begin with certain intuitions that I believe are widely shared, and then test these with the use of imagined case studies. There may be tension between what we commonly think and what we think in relation to specific cases, and when there is I will attempt to revise one of the set of intuitions. Philosophers writing on meaning of life tend to think that claims about meaningfulness of life are either true or false, or that it is appropriate to act as if they are.¹⁹ Absolute confirmation of their truth, as in other areas of philosophy such as ethics, is unlikely, but this does not render the project useless.

¹⁹ Metz, "Recent Work on Meaning of Life," p. 802.

Chapter Two

Why cyborgs could have more meaningful lives than us

I have argued in chapter one that an objectivist naturalist view is at least substantially plausible and now, when defending the idea that cyborgs could have more meaningful lives than us, I appeal to a premise that would be widely shared among objective naturalists, as well as many supernaturalists and subjectivists about meaning. This premise is that achievement and activity are sources of meaning in a life. For example, the achievement of having produced a beautiful work of art and the activity of working to alleviate the suffering of those in dire need are generally considered meaningful.

Aristotle, an objectivist about meaning, famously describes the good life²⁰ as one in which a person engages in rational *activity*²¹ in accordance with the virtues. Most theists hold that God expects us to *do* something with that which he endows us if our lives are to be meaningful, such as carry out God's purpose. Many subjectivists about meaning believe that life's meaning arises in virtue of being absorbed by the activities one engages

²⁰ It seems to me that when Aristotle speaks of the good or "happy" life, he is thinking along the lines of what we call the "meaningful life" and not the life of pleasure.

²¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Christopher Rowe, trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 1102a5.

in, or that having purposes which one takes steps to realise is essential to meaningfulness, or that meaning arises when one achieves that which one believes is significant.²²

Cybernetic improvements to human beings are likely to increase the skill and success with which they engage in meaningful behaviour and make possible certain meaningful behaviour that was previously impossible. By “meaningful behaviour” I mean to include both meaningful activities and meaningful achievements, between which I distinguish below. In other words, cyborgs can engage in greater and more varied amounts²³ of meaningful behaviour than unenhanced human beings. It seems, then, that accepting the claim that certain activities and achievements are a source of meaning for a life involves accepting that cybernetic enhancements can make a life more meaningful. I will now draw some important distinctions between meaningful activities and meaningful achievements, and go on to consider which kinds of behaviour count as meaningful. I will argue that what makes a behaviour meaningful is that it develops or expresses what is most praiseworthy ‘human’ and that it involves “real” experiences. Following this I will apply my theory of meaning to the questions of whether cybernetic enhancements can increase meaning in a life, and how to go about making judgements of the relative meaningfulness of various activities and achievements. Lastly I will argue that one can increase the meaning in one’s life by increasing how much meaningful behaviour one engages in by means of cybernetic enhancements.

The difference between meaningful activities and meaningful achievements

²² Metz, “Recent Work on Meaning of Life,” p. 793.

Meaningful achievements and meaningful activities are often intertwined in various ways, but meaningful achievements can primarily be defined as meaningful results: that is, meaningful *effects* of actions on the world, while meaningful activities can be defined as meaningful actions, or *doings*. In most cases it is thought that if an event or effect on the world is to contribute meaning to a person's life, the person in question must be responsible for the event or effect, for example if creating an artwork is to contribute meaning to S's life, then S must be responsible for having created it. In some cases meaning can be made possible for a person via the actions of others, and making meaning possible for others seems to be one way in which the life of the person responsible increases in meaning. For example if a doctor discovers a cure for the otherwise fatal illness one is suffering from, then he makes it *possible* for one's life to become more meaningful than it would have been if it had ended at that point. That is, though the doctor is not responsible for making one's life more meaningful (as this is up to what decisions one makes after being cured), he is responsible for making more meaning at least a possibility for one, and this seems to be something that can contribute some meaning to his life.

Sometimes meaningful actions are internal rather than external events; that is, events which occur within a person (i.e. mental events) and do not necessarily involve physical or visible activity. For example, listening to (certain kinds of) music appears to be a meaningful activity that involves internal events. In order for music listening to be meaningful, it must involve intentionality. It is certainly possible to ignore music or not

to focus on it, for example when one is distracted by something else, and in this case the meaningful activity of listening to music will not have taken place, even if the music is beautiful. We tend to think of beautiful music as “moving”, but it is not possible to be moved or touched by music unless one is attentively listening, that is, actively “taking the music in” and engaging with it. Thus meaningful music listening consists in a number of actions, although the actions in this case are internal, i.e. mental.

In some cases the meaningfulness of an activity is obtained from the results of the activity, for example in the case where a person (perhaps in a war situation) rows a boat in order to get innocent victims to safety. Rowing a boat is not normally what we consider to be a meaningful activity, but because of the meaningful end towards which this activity is directed, such an activity acquires meaningfulness. It seems to me that any activity with meaningful results will count as meaningful because the achievement confers meaning on the activity that brought it about. Furthermore, any activity that one engages in while attempting to achieve the right kinds of achievements (i.e. meaningful ones), will count as meaningful as long as the activity one engages in is relatively likely to bring about the achievement in question. For example, riding an elephant in an uninhabited desert with intentions of curing a disease will not count as meaningful activity since this cannot reasonably be expected to bring about the intended achievement. Reading books about diseases is an activity better suited to this end, but getting a degree and doing relevant experiments are more likely to bring about the achievement, and are thus likely to be more meaningful activities than reading about diseases.

However meaningful activities do not necessarily acquire their meaningfulness from the results of the activity. In some cases activities obtain their meaningfulness from the fact that a person is in some way engaged with certain valuable objects, for example, the activity of listening to music appears to acquire its meaningfulness from the fact that a person is engaging with a valuable object, namely beautiful music. It would be strange to consider “listening to music” as an achievement, since it is a process (or a series of actions), not a single outcome. John Cottingham argues that activities must be achievement-oriented if they are to confer meaning on a life²⁴ but the example of music clearly shows that they need not be, even if in many cases some achievement-orientation is identifiable (in some cases the achievement being aimed at is only an abstract and ostensibly unattainable one such as “Eradicate disease”, or “End third world debt”). In the case of music there is no goal that one aims to achieve, and in fact goal-orientation (such as “memorise this music” or “enjoy this music”) may even be thought (at least in some cases) to *detract* from the meaningfulness of this activity. Is it possible that we have some kind of vaguer goal in mind, such as to understand what the musician is trying to communicate, or to feel some kind of emotion (perhaps the emotion that is being expressed by the song)? This seems implausible since not all musicians aim to communicate anything (at least in the sense of clear propositions) with their music, and not all music is designed to elicit emotion. Could the relevant achievement-orientation of meaningful music listening then be “to have engaged with the music”? This also seems implausible, since we do not consciously approach music thinking “I will now aim, by

²⁴ John Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life* (New York: Routledge, 2003): p. 21.

the end of listening, to have engaged with this piece of music”, and one does not think with pride afterwards “I have achieved something”. A listening experience would probably not be meaningful without intention to engage with the music, and concentration on the music, but concentrating and engaging are not goals: they are activities. It seems to me that a meaningful listening experience first and foremost involves engaging with valuable music, not striving for anything. However, in many cases activities acquire their meaningfulness from the fact that a person is in the process of attempting to achieve something, even if she never *actually* achieves it, for example, striving to reduce environmental damage through publishing information on how to save electricity appears to be a meaningful activity, even if this aim is not achieved.

It seems that meaningful achievements are always preceded by meaningful activity, because the achievement confers meaning on the activity that brought it about, as in the above case of rowing the boat. However, meaningful achievements need not be preceded by large amounts of meaningful activity, for example, in the case of a child genius who composes a beautiful piece of music. The composition surely still counts as a meaningful achievement, even if it was not preceded by large amounts of relevant meaningful activity (i.e. composing). One might think that there are meaningful achievements that are spontaneously brought about (i.e. that are not preceded by meaningful activity), such as when a person sacrifices his life for the sake of many in a situation where he is given a few seconds to make the choice. The result brought about, i.e. the safety of many people who would have otherwise been injured or killed, is meaningful. However, even though the sacrifice was quick, it seems that it still counts as a meaningful activity, since it

involves a series of actions (even if these include very few actions, some of these being mental events: for example, deciding to save the people and pushing a button). The meaningfulness of the sacrifice seems to be acquired both from the intention and attempt to save the people, as well as from the achievement of actually saving them.

If it is true that any activities that are intended to bring about, and are relatively likely to bring about, the right kinds of achievements are meaningful and any activity with meaningful results will count as meaningful (even if it does not usually – that is, in other contexts - count as meaningful), does this mean that meaningful activities count less meaning-wise than meaningful achievements? Or, is there some kind of dependence of meaningful activity on meaningful achievement?

In some cases it seems that the meaning of an achievement would be enhanced if an achievement were preceded by a large amount of meaningful activity. This suggests that there are cases in which it is the activity that confers meaning on the achievement, and not only the achievement that confers meaning on activity. For example, if someone with a debilitating illness was nonetheless able to get a degree as a result of consistently trying to learn as much as possible, we tend to think this is a more meaningful achievement than someone who did so by doing hardly any work. However, the lesser amount of meaningful activity beforehand does not rob the second student's achievement of all its meaning, and while more meaningful activity may in some cases enhance meaning, this point alone does not provide reason to think that achievements do not count for more meaning-wise than activities.

Another reason one might think that achievements are more meaningful than activities is that it is widely thought that a degree of success²⁵ is *necessary* for activities to be meaningful, for example, someone who succeeds in finding a cure for a terrible disease might naturally be thought of as having acted meaningfully while someone who only tried, and failed, would not. Furthermore some think that if a meaningful activity that is directed towards a certain end does not succeed, the activity is rendered meaningless. For example, Cottingham describes a case where someone makes a large amount of sacrifices to build a hospital that is destroyed, along with the lives of many people, by a meteorite.²⁶ Although there is clearly some loss in meaning here, it is less clear to me that the life of the person responsible acquires no meaning from such activity, especially given his intentions and the fact that the activity he engaged in was likely to bring about the results he desired. While I have already provided examples of meaningful activity that need not achieve anything in order to be meaningful such as listening to music, there is another reason to think that this hierarchy is mistaken, at least as a general rule. It seems that some activities are not only in their nature meaningful independently of any results they achieve, but also can in some cases be *more* meaningful than certain achievements even if they fail to have good consequences. For example, imagine a nun, Mother Francis, who devotes all her time and energy to helping the poor, sick and miserable. Unbeknownst to her, an evil man, Voldermortor tracks down every person she helps and murders them. Intuitively it seems that Voldermortor does not undermine all of the meaningfulness of Francis's work, even if he prevents it from becoming an achievement

²⁵ Berit Brogaard and Barry Smith, "On Luck, Responsibility and the Meaning of Life," *Philosophical Papers* 34 (2005): p. 454.

²⁶ Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life*, p. 66.

(at least, he prevents Francis from achieving a state affairs where a certain percentage of people who were previously poor, miserable and sick are now healthy, which is presumably where Mother Francis is aiming), and Mother Francis's activity seems to me to be more meaningful than the achievement of winning the Comrades Marathon. It seems then that we cannot assume that achievements are in their nature more meaningful than activities. Rather, *certain* achievements are more meaningful than certain activities, as in the finding cures versus trying to find cures case, and certain activities are more meaningful than certain achievements, as in the helping the poor, miserable and sick versus the comrades marathon case.

There are some qualities that we would expect both meaningful activities and meaningful achievements to have. For one, Cottingham argues that activities cannot be trivial or silly if they are to be meaningful.²⁷ This seems plausible, especially since other terms we associate with meaningfulness are "importance" and "significance". Berit Brogaard and Barry Smith also think that a meaningful activity cannot be of a trivial type, and add that a person must also freely desire, choose, plan and aim to engage in a behaviour if it is to add meaning to her life.²⁸ It seems to me that meaningful achievements may be made more meaningful if a person intends to achieve such a result, for example a person who aimed to cure and succeeded in curing cancer may have a more meaningful life than one who did so accidentally, but intention does not appear to be a necessary condition, given the results that certain very meaningful achievements (such as discovering cures) produce in the world. Furthermore, choice, and particularly planning or desiring, like intention,

²⁷ Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life*, p. 21.

²⁸ Metz, "New Developments in the Meaning of Life," p. 207.

do not appear to be necessary for meaning, but they do tend to enhance it. Even if a person were locked up and forced to compose music it seems that, if this music turned out to be beautiful, it would still add meaning to a life. Cottingham argues that the person “who is in the grip of psychological distortions or projections, and whose goals are therefore not transparent, risks an erosion of their status as an autonomous agent engaged in meaningful activities”,²⁹ but it seems to me that even the person who is deluded will add some meaning to her life by engaging in particularly meaningful behaviour, as will the person who does so by accident. Furthermore, in some cases producing experience *unconsciously* seems to be one source of meaning in a life: for example, one might want to attribute some meaning (even if not a lot) to the life of someone in a coma, if she happened to be very beautiful and people who saw her were moved by her beauty. However, it does seem that if the person is not fully responsible for the behaviour, the behaviour will not contribute as much meaning as it would under conditions of awareness and intention.

I will now discuss which types of activities and achievements count as meaningful, and then how we are to identify what kinds of behaviour counts as meaningful.

In virtue of what is behaviour meaningful?

It would be useful to know whether there are any substantive principles or features that characterise meaningful behaviour, or in virtue of which meaningful behaviour is generally meaningful. A suggestion that has prima facie appeal is that meaningful

²⁹ Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life*, p. 22.

behaviour is generally behaviour that develops or expresses what is most admirably ‘human’ about us; i.e. what is most praiseworthy and valuable about the human being, and this is the view that I will in fact defend. Prima facie candidates for what is most admirably human about us are the capacity for reflective activity, a view espoused by Aristotle “since intelligence... is highest of the things in us”,³⁰ the capacity for autonomous rational choice and morality (or the “good will”)³¹, as argued by Immanuel Kant, the capacity for love³² as argued by Susan Wolf, and the capacity for creativity³³, as argued by Richard Taylor. All these capacities seem to have in common a general capacity for both certain emotions (for example empathy and love) and rational thought, and these are characteristically human capacities. Thomas Hurka describes rationality as the capacity to “form and act on beliefs and intentions”³⁴ where these are “sophisticated...[and have] contents that stretch across persons and times and that are arranged in complex hierarchies”³⁵ as well as the ability to “achieve explanatory understanding ...[by grasping] generalisations that apply across objects and times”³⁶ and to “envisage patterns of action that stretch through time or involve other agents...[and] intelligent tool use”.³⁷ The type of emotions that are relevant here are those that are associated with love, such as empathy.

According to such a view saving people, helping to eliminate poverty and discovering cures for diseases count as meaningful behaviour since helping others involves exercising

³⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177a21.

³¹ Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Lewis White Beck trans. (Indianapolis: Library of Liberal Arts, 1959): p. 393.

³² Wolf, “The True, the Good, and the Lovable,” p. 237.

³³ Richard Taylor, “The Meaning of Life,” available at <<http://www.philosophynow.org/archive/articles/24taylor.htm>>.

³⁴ Hurka, *Perfectionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993): p. 39.

³⁵ Hurka, *Perfectionism*, p. 39.

³⁶ Hurka, *Perfectionism*, p. 39.

³⁷ Hurka, *Perfectionism*, p. 39.

one's capacity for moral goodness, and moral awareness seems to be dependent on rationality, and in some cases empathy (and thus the capacity for the right kind of emotion). Scientific discoveries and ground-breaking philosophical papers count as meaningful behaviour since they involve pursuit of truth and understanding (and thus rational thought) and creating art exhibits our capacity for creativity (which also involves intellectual capacity, and in some cases empathy). Nurturing our relationships through doing things like looking after those we care about when they are sick or showing our support by taking an interest in the interests of those we love (for example, watching a concert in which one's sister is singing) count as meaningful activities because they exhibit our capacity for love (a particularly significant emotion). Meaningful behaviour need not only develop rationality and our capacity for love in *oneself*, it can also develop it in others, for example, teaching a course on logic is meaningful since it helps to develop the rational capacities of others. Many specific instances of meaningful behaviour contribute to particularly admirable projects of the wider human community, such as the accumulation of knowledge, artistic excellence and creation of beauty, peace and human solidarity, all of which require and involve our capacities for either or both rational thought and certain emotion.

However, what is meaningful is not merely what is *distinctive* about human beings. Although many philosophers point out that rationality is a feature peculiar to human beings, we could imagine that opposable thumbs were too, but this would not lead us to think that opposable thumbs in themselves would contribute any meaning to life. Thus it appears that being a feature unique to human beings is not sufficient to ground

meaningfulness. It is rather the case that what is most admirably or *valuably* human seems to be what we consider to be meaningful and what we would consider meaningful, and this is true whether or not only human beings have these features or not. Oswald Hanfling points out that we would still highly regard the intellect were we to discover other creatures (for example, aliens) that could reason, so that it is not uniqueness to human beings that makes the intellect significant.³⁸ What we most admire about human beings would not change were dolphins suddenly to evolve rationality³⁹ by developing advanced brains that made them capable of art and understanding: in this case we might consider dolphins to live meaningful lives rather than reassess the behaviour as meaningless now that it is no longer unique to human beings. Similarly, if human beings, perhaps as an unforeseen result of being exposed to radiation from cell phones, were to suddenly lose their ability to understand things, we would consider their lives to have collectively become less meaningful rather than consider understanding to have become something that no longer counts as a meaning-contributing factor.

However perhaps this way of understanding “human” as tied to what features human beings as a species actually have is too strict: perhaps we need to understand “human” in a looser sense as a collection of features that many human beings (as understood as belonging to the species *homo sapiens*) have, but not all (for example severely mentally handicapped people), and that non-human beings might have (for example aliens and androids). If this is the case then if dolphins were to evolve, we might say they are becoming more “human”, in the looser sense, and if human beings were to degenerate

³⁸ Oswald Hanfling, *The Quest for Meaning* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987): p. 131.

³⁹ Hurka, *Perfectionism*, p. 11.

from cell phone damage, then we might say they are becoming less “human”, as they have lost one of the features that make up a “human” being, as opposed to a human being. Thus meaningful behaviour is behaviour that expresses or develops what is most valuable “human”: a group of capabilities that some who belong to the species *homo sapiens* have, that some that do not belong to the species (or are not even alive in the usual understanding of the word) such as androids might conceivably come to have, and that creatures like bats, bugs and octopuses and plants like cacti, trees and grass do not have. One might admire the capacity of spiders to make webs, the capacity of cheetahs to run fast and lions to roar so loud. However, such capacities are not what we consider particularly valuable about “humans”, and as such are not among those capacities that add meaning. Particularly valuable features are not valuable for what they bring about. Neither are they valuable because they are rare - a universe that is teeming with creativity, understanding and love, is one in which there is more meaning, not less. Rather, they are valuable in themselves, and rationality and love appear to be these kinds of features.

Cottingham holds a similar view to mine. According to Cottingham, “A meaningful life...must involve worthwhile activities or projects that enable us to flourish as human beings. Such flourishing requires the development of our human capacities for feeling and reason: it involves cultivating the faculties that allow sympathetic emotional interaction and open rational dialogue with our fellow humans.”⁴⁰ Cottingham’s view differs from mine by including an extra element that he thinks is required for meaning in

⁴⁰ Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life*, p. 64.

life. Like me, he argues a life cannot simply be meaningful in virtue of “being directed towards the flowering of our human nature”⁴¹, if this is to be understood as “a collection of contingent facts about the sort of creatures we humans have evolved to be”⁴²; rather it must be directed towards what is “noblest and best about us”⁴³. However, Cottingham argues that human beings need a religious perspective that allows them to have hope that in the end good will prevail, because without this confidence in the good the motivation to pursue the good (or to be specific, the meaningful) will be lacking, given how fragile the good (or the meaningful) appears to be if this is the only world that exists.⁴⁴ Belief in the existence of God, according to Cottingham, renders what would otherwise simply be “a set of characteristics that a certain species happens intermittently to possess”,⁴⁵ something we can intelligibly view as worth pursuing since we believe it is desired by an infinitely good being who created us, that we achieve it. If we believe God exists, then we can believe that our struggles to pursue the good contribute “to the establishment of a moral order that the cosmos was created to realise”,⁴⁶ rather than being the outcome of contingent events or blind forces.

However, it seems clear to me that not everyone needs such views in order to be committed to the good, or to attempt meaningful behaviour. For many atheists the strong conviction that certain things are particularly valuable is motivation enough to engage in meaningful behaviour. A religious perspective does not seem to be a requirement for

⁴¹ Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life*, p. 71.

⁴² Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life*, p. 71.

⁴³ Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life*, p. 71.

⁴⁴ Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life*, p. 72.

⁴⁵ Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life*, p. 72.

⁴⁶ Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life*, p. 72.

having a meaningful life and meaningful behaviour certainly does not seem to be even partly constituted by a person's having a religious view since there are many people who are atheists who we consider to have led meaningful lives, for example, Jean-Paul Sartre.

Thomas Hurka's view is also similar to mine – specifically in that he identifies rationality as a particularly worthwhile feature to develop. Hurka, in developing a theory of moral perfectionism, seeks to provide a definition of human nature since according to perfectionism the morally good life develops “properties... [that] constitute human nature or are definitive of humanity – they make humans humans”.⁴⁷ The properties that make up human nature, according to Hurka, are ones that are essential to humans: if something is to count as a human, it must have those properties.⁴⁸ Hurka chooses the properties on the basis that they are “central to the truest, simplest, and most predictively powerful explanations of humans' other properties”⁴⁹ and because they pass the test of thought experiments.⁵⁰ One of these properties is that we are embodied living things. Hurka argues that because of this one of the perfections that we should aim at (besides practical and theoretical rationality) is “highest physical perfection”⁵¹ and this involves health and vigorous bodily activity, best seen in excellent athletes. He writes that “when a human runs 100 metres in 9.86 seconds or long-jumps 29 feet, something physically splendid occurs. His bodily powers are realized to the full in a way that is intrinsically admirable and of intrinsic perfectionist worth”.⁵² According to Hurka “robustness... makes the life

⁴⁷ Hurka, *Perfectionism*: p. 3.

⁴⁸ Hurka, *Perfectionism*: p. 11.

⁴⁹ Hurka, *Perfectionism*: p. 19.

⁵⁰ Hurka, *Perfectionism*: p. 34.

⁵¹ Hurka, *Perfectionism*: p. 39.

⁵² Hurka, *Perfectionism*: p. 39.

more fully human”⁵³ so that development of our physical nature is not only instrumentally valuable (since it helps us to stay alert and thus helps us to exercise rationality) but also intrinsically valuable.⁵⁴

By saying that what constitutes meaningful behaviour is that it develops or expresses what is most valuably human about us where the latter is understood as including the capacity for rationality and certain emotions, I have left out physical capacities. It is not clear to me that our physical abilities are one of the features that are most admirable about us, or that they are one of the abilities most worthy of development. However, it does seem to be an intuition shared by many that achievements such as winning the comrades marathon are meaningful, and this suggests that developing our physical nature is meaningful. However, it still seems to me that if we include this in the theory of meaning, it must play a lesser role than the other capacities because as I have mentioned before, I think that such activities count less meaning-wise than do the capacities for rationality and certain emotions. One reason for this is that many of our physical abilities when compared with animals are quite feeble: we don't jump particularly high or run particularly fast, or have particularly impressive strength compared with other animal species, and if our physical abilities were to be particularly valuable it seems to me that they should fare better when compared with other animals.

One of the problems someone might have with my theory of meaning is that it may seem too demanding. It might seem to rule out as meaningful⁵⁵ lives in which people highly

⁵³ Hurka, *Perfectionism*: p 38.

⁵⁴ Hurka, *Perfectionism*: p. 39.

develop a skill such as table tennis or tenpin bowling, since playing table tennis and tenpin bowling are not what is *most* valuable or esteemed about being human. I am willing to allow that such behaviour might contribute some meaning to a life, but when comparing these behaviours to other behaviours such as discovering cures for terrible diseases, they pale in comparison. Getting very good at table tennis might be admirable in the sense of the coordination and determination it displays, as well as a pleasurable and worthwhile⁵⁶ way to spend one's time, but nonetheless it does not strike me as *particularly* meaningful. That is, it is just not valuable (or admirable) enough a behaviour to count as a very meaningful one, even if it is valuable in other ways that make it worth doing.

Someone might object to my identifying meaningful behaviour as behaviour that develops or expresses what is most admirably 'human' (in the sense I have specified) about us by saying that I include as meaningful some lives that in fact do not seem to be meaningful. For example, on this definition androids (robots with artificial intelligence) could count as having meaningful lives. I think that this is just a bullet that needs to be bitten. If there really are androids capable of creating art or gaining understanding or helping others, then I think that at least some meaning must attach to their lives.

⁵⁵ Here I mean "meaningful on the whole". As I have noted in Chapter One, I will not be considering this issue in my paper. However, on my view table tennis and ten pin bowling may not contribute enough meaning to render "meaningful on the whole" the lives of those who dedicate their lives to these activities, and this is a conclusion that some might not want to accept. While I think that such a conclusion might well follow from my theory of meaning, it does not seem to me to be an intuitively implausible one.

⁵⁶ Here "worthwhile" is meant to be understood as I have used the term in Chapter One and not as being equivalent to "meaningful".

My account may also seem objectionable on grounds that it assumes that the circumstances one is faced with can make a substantial difference to meaning, and some may feel that everyone is capable of an equal amount of meaning depending on their using their potential to the best of their abilities given the circumstances. For example, consider a person who is confined to concentration camps for long periods but chooses to live with as much dignity and optimism and courage as possible. Such a person does not live a meaningless existence on my account, since he is responding in a way that is admirably human to what life has thrown his way. However, relative to human beings who are not imprisoned and prohibited from all sorts of activities such a person will probably not have a *very* meaningful life and it seems to me that part of the reason why we would very much like to avoid such situations is because they have so little opportunity for meaning. Thus the circumstances and the possibilities for meaning that they produce play a large role in how meaningful a life is on my account – larger than some would like to think. Cottingham notes that the frailty of human life would seem to suggest that my kind of view would rule out as meaningful those lives that fail as a result of “birth, or upbringing, or ill-health, or lack of resources, or accident”⁵⁷ to include meaningful elements and he finds this kind of view *morally* offensive as it denies that each human being has a dignity which confers on him infinite value.⁵⁸ However, I do not see why we cannot maintain that human beings have a dignity but also accept that the meaningfulness of their lives varies considerably according to luck. Morally speaking human beings deserve respectful treatment and are equally valuable even if in terms of

⁵⁷ Cottingham, *On the meaning of Life*, p. 69.

⁵⁸ Cottingham, *On the meaning of Life*, p. 92.

meaning their lives vary, but this is not problematic since meaning and morality are different categories of value.⁵⁹

Thus it seems to me that behaviour is meaningful in virtue of expressing or developing what is most admirably human about us. However, behaviour also involves experiences of certain types, and I will argue briefly in the next section that the experiences of engaging in meaningful activities or bringing about meaningful achievements must be “real”: i.e. they must causally interact with the “real” world and not be simulated.

Real experience as part of what constitutes meaning

Robert Audi identifies meaningful projects as those that are constituted by *rewarding* experiences either in one’s own life or that one manages to produce in the lives of others. Rewarding experiences are those in which one’s rational capacities are engaged in sophisticated and diverse ways”.⁶⁰ Metz objects that Audi’s account is problematic because it implies that a person could have a meaningful life in an experience machine, since it chiefly involves pleasant experience, which he argues is more relevant to happiness than the meaningful life.⁶¹ The other problematic thing about experience as a candidate for a constitutive condition for meaning is that experience need not be caused by real things in the world, or be accompanied by actual effects in the world. The

⁵⁹ I will argue in Chapter Five that acting in morally bad ways can negatively affect the amount of meaning in one’s life.

⁶⁰ Robert Audi, “Intrinsic Value and Meaningful Life,” *Philosophical Papers* 34 (2005): pp. 331-355.

⁶¹ Metz., “New Developments in the Meaning of Life,” p. 208.

experience machine provides experience and merely simulates action, and intuitively it seems that simulated action is not sufficient to provide meaning.

Audi recognises that “hallucinatory experience...differ[s] from its veridical counterpart”⁶² so that there is more inherent value in the veridical experience because objects in the real world can be valuable in themselves (even if this goodness is not “basic”, since it exists in virtue of being capable of producing rewarding experiences, which are basically good, according to Audi).⁶³ It appears that Audi wants to say that experiences are *more* meaningful if they occur in the real world, but not that they are completely meaningless if they occur in the experience machine. However it seems to me that experiences that occur in the experience machine *are* meaningless. This is because meaning appears to me to concern one’s interaction with things or states of affairs that really exist. Though the object of interaction ranges from people to valuable objects, if these things do not *exist*, then interaction with them seems to be meaningless. It is this intuition that explains the horror a person imagines she would feel if she were to discover that everything she had experienced up to now was simulated: the horror, in my opinion, would mostly result from the realisation that her life is meaningless. It appears to me that even the desire not to be deceived does not explain as well why most people cringe at the idea of entering the experience machine, as does fear of meaninglessness.

Thus *real* experiences (i.e. experiences that are properly causally connected with the world), whether experienced or produced in others, are necessary for meaningful

⁶² Audi, “Intrinsic Value and Meaningful Life,” p. 340.

⁶³ Audi, “Intrinsic Value and Meaningful Life,” p. 340.

behaviour: that is, meaningfulness requires not only that we develop or express our human capacities for rationality and certain emotion, but also that the conditions under which we do this are real, not just simulated. For example, behaviour that takes place in virtual reality is not “real” experience since it does not link up with and reflect the “real” world – only a computer generated one.

My theory of meaning applied to the questions of whether cybernetic enhancements can increase meaning in a life, and how to go about making judgements of the relative meaningfulness of various activities and achievements.

On my theory of meaning becoming enhanced is *prima facie* one way in which one could increase meaning in one’s life since enhancements appear to make possible more rational activity. One reason for this is that enhancements would decrease the amount of time spent on repetitive, mind-numbing tasks that require negligible intelligence so that more time can be spent on tasks that are more challenging, such as reading philosophy.

Cybernetic enhancements could remove or decrease the amount of other obstacles to engaging in more rational activity, for example, by increasing one’s memory, or even increasing one’s general knowledge as a result of implanted chips, since often forgetting something important or not knowing a term’s definition can limit how deeply one can think about information at hand.

Furthermore enhancements could make possible deeper care for other human beings and thus develop the cyborg's capacity for love or empathy. This is because acting in the interests of someone (for example, helping them) tends to develop emotional ties between one and the person one helps, or at least develops one's concern for the person one helps, especially if the helping occurs over a length of time. Since enhancements will in many cases make possible more opportunities for helping others (since enhancements in many cases will provide one with increased strength or abilities that are necessary for helping people in certain situations), cyborgs are more likely to actually help people. This is the case especially if a person is required to undergo tests that assess her commitment to the good⁶⁴ before she is allowed to get enhanced, assuming that the kind of people who pass these tests and thereafter get enhancements will be the kind of people who try to help people in general. If helping people develops one's concern for them, or "fellow feeling" and this can increase meaning in a life, then enhancements can increase meaning in one's life in this way.

Cybernetic enhancement could also make possible more meaningful behaviour in which rational activity and certain emotions play important roles. For example, with the help of an artificial skin a person who is naturally born with great susceptibility to skin disease could thereafter offer comfort to those suffering from leprosy without hesitation. If she were also to get artificial wing prostheses, her travels between lepers could be made more comfortable and speedy, by taking strain off her legs. In the case of the scientist,

⁶⁴ I will argue in Chapter Five that there is good reason for these types of tests to be administered.

artificial muscles in his legs and back could help him to fight fatigue, and an artificial memory device could help him to retain information that might be relevant to finding cures. Enhancements could increase the amount and types of achievements and activities that a person is capable of and could also make possible almost immediate achievements that do not require previously engaging in large amounts of meaningful activity in order to be meaningful: for example, someone who would normally spend her time chiefly on composing music could, with the help of wing prostheses be a life-guard rescuing drowning people on weekends, and compose more by cutting out time spent in traffic. This way she is capable of both more meaningful activities (composing, trying to prevent loss of life) as well meaningful achievements (contributing new music to the world and saving lives).

The amount of meaning that an activity or achievement “counts for” depends on how much it develops or expresses our particularly admirable human capacities. Some behaviours express or develop our human capacities to a great extent while others do so to a far lesser degree. The former increase meaning substantially and the latter only enhance meaning in a life to some extent. The amount by which an element decreases meaning in a life depends on the extent to which it prevents one or others from expressing or developing their human capacities. For example, murder (in most cases) would seriously decrease the amount of meaning in the life of the murderer since by murdering his victim he deprives her of her ability to exercise *any* of her human capacities and since he displays a serious lack of fellow-feeling. However, writing a particularly brilliant philosophy book or starting a home for orphans and spending the

bulk of one's time caring for them are substantial meaning contributors as both activities demand extensive exercise and development of our capacities for reason and love respectively.

There are clear cases where increasing the amount of meaningful behaviour one engages in increases the meaningfulness of a life relative to its including less meaningful behaviour. For example, finding a cure for two terrible diseases seems to add more meaning to a life than finding only one, and finding ten seems to add even more meaning than finding two. As an example of a meaningful activity (as opposed to an achievement) where this is the case, consider Mother Teresa who spent her time helping the poor for many years. She sacrificed other activities (for example rearing her own children) in order to pursue this one, and it seems to me that at least part of the reason why we think that she had such a meaningful life, apart from the fact that she engaged in meaningful activity, is that she engaged in so *much* meaningful activity.

If someone is to accept my claim that cybernetic enhancements can make a life more meaningful, he needs to accept the claim that by increasing the amount of meaningful behaviour one engages in, one can increase the meaning in one's life. It is objections to this claim that I will consider in the next section.

Why would someone think that engaging in behaviour of a certain kind does not lead to a more meaningful life?

In this paper I am focusing on only one part of the meaningful life, but some have argued that theories that focus on individual elements in a life that can be bearers of meaning are misguided in the sense that they reduce a life to what Johan Brännmark describes as a “container”⁶⁵ of meaning. According to this aggregative view of meaning, meaning can be increased or decreased much as the amount of water in a bucket can be increased or decreased, and more meaning, quantitatively speaking, is preferable to less, and is a worthy aim to pursue. According to this view certain factors, such as meaningful activities, certain types of relationships and effort increase meaningfulness while others, such as cruelty and laziness, decrease, or fail to increase meaningfulness. That is, the ingredients of a life determine its meaning-quotient so that a life can be more or less meaningful depending on its ingredients, and the amounts of these.

A serious problem for the aggregative view is the possibility that life considered as a whole is the sole bearer of meaning; that is, no parts of a life are meaningful in themselves. According to this view the order and specific interrelation of events is fundamental to their meaningfulness. This view denies that there are some elements that contribute meaning, no matter where they are situated in our lives.

According to Johan Brännmark, if one is to make a final judgement of a life, one cannot only make judgements about separate parts of life. Brännmark draws an analogy between lives and novels: in evaluating a novel we make an overall judgement about its quality, but we don't “[dream] of having an algorithm in which we could simply feed the quality

⁶⁵ Johan Brännmark, “Leading Lives: On Happiness and Narrative Meaning,” *Philosophical Papers* 32 (2003): p. 330.

of its parts and get its overall quality without having to perform some final substantive act of judgement about the work as a whole”⁶⁶, even if we can see how parts of the novel contribute to making it better or worse. Brännmark argues that in evaluating the parts of a book and how they contribute to its goodness, the most we can say is how *important* they are in making the book good, but not that they have specific values. Jerrold Levinson argues for the same kind of point as Brännmark, but in a different way, namely by saying that only “lives being certain ways”⁶⁷ are appropriate candidates for the description “intrinsically valuable”, since anything less than this is intrinsically valuable only given the addition of relations to other things and certain states of affairs being present. For example, while joy appears to be a fair candidate for intrinsic value, we hesitate to say that it is intrinsically valuable in a case where a person has just murdered a bus full of people. Rather, that joy must be appropriate given the circumstances and the other events in a person’s life. Since all candidates for intrinsic value turn out to need qualification such as this, Levinson argues that we must accept that “slices of life” are what are intrinsically valuable, not types of experience, such as joy.⁶⁸

If Brännmark and Levinson are right, then simply increasing certain elements in a life, such as meaningful activities and achievements, will not add meaning to a life if they do not occur in the right order or in relation to the right circumstances and other experiences. Applied to my argument, whether an enhancement will increase meaning will depend

⁶⁶ Brännmark, “Leading Lives: On Happiness and Narrative Meaning.” p.324.

⁶⁷ Jerrold Levinson, “Intrinsic Value and the Notion of a Life,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62 (2004): p. 319.

⁶⁸ Levinson, “Intrinsic Value and the Notion of a Life,” pp. 319–29.

heavily on when it is used, and the meaningfulness of an enhancement will be just about impossible to estimate independently of information about specific events in a life.

However, I think that Brännmark and Levinson are mistaken in denying that elements in a life can have a specific fixed value, no matter where they are situated and that the value of elements varies according to, and can even be cancelled out by, the positioning of these elements relative to other elements. I will now consider some examples that they provide respectively and argue that these are not convincing. Brännmark gives the example of Smith achieving a great victory, that turns out to be the one event which “sends his life down a tragic path,”⁶⁹ to illustrate his claim that parts of a life are only valuable depending on their location within a life as a whole. Let’s imagine Smith is really Elvis and the achievement is recording his first album. Let’s assume too that it was the huge amount of money and fame that followed that contributed to Elvis’s taking huge amounts of drugs and dying at a young age: surely a tragic end, given his talent. Are we to say that his first album was consequently not a meaningful achievement, or that recording it was not a meaningful activity? Surely not. Brännmark seems to think it is natural to say that this achievement or activity is not as meaningful as it seemed at the time, given hindsight. However, I think it is more natural to say that Elvis’s subsequent decline is something that subtracts some meaning from his life as a whole, but not from the achievement or activity itself, since the value of this is stable. Similarly, it seems mistaken to consider Elvis Presley’s life any less meaningful simply because towards the *end* of his life he developed a drug addiction. We may think it is better to end one’s life

⁶⁹ Brännmark, “Leading Lives: On Happiness and Narrative Meaning,” p. 326.

on a “high note”, but I suspect this is more because we would prefer to avoid low periods in general. Many great lives end in a deteriorated state since people tend to deteriorate as they grow older, and this does not detract from the meaning of their lives in my opinion. Presley’s drug addiction and decline are regrettable and in themselves do not add meaning to his life, but their timing seems to make little difference to meaning. Similarly, in the case of a concentration camp survivor we tend to think that meaning arises because of the virtues developed, not because as a result his life exhibits a certain pattern (of going from a bad patch to a better patch), and it seems to me that the meaning in such a life would not be threatened if his life happened to deteriorate once again as a result of disease. Lastly it is also not clear to me that lack of repetitiveness (which is presumably another way that events could affect the meaningfulness of other events according to a narrative view) especially if what is being repeated are particularly “meaningful” activities, makes a difference to meaningfulness: for example, if one accepts that finding two cures adds more meaning than finding one, which seems reasonable, then why should ten cures not add even more meaning? I do not find it plausible to dismiss the ten-cures case as no more meaningful on the grounds that it is repetitive or that it would get boring. Even if there was much repetitive work involved in finding the cures, it seems that the value of the cures themselves far out weigh any drawback in meaning that repetition or boredom is likely to cause.

The example that Levinson uses is of a man taking pleasure in beautiful music just after his wife has died.⁷⁰ The idea is that the context, namely that his wife has just died, strips

⁷⁰ Levinson, “Intrinsic Value and the Notion of a Life,” p. 325.

the moment of its meaningfulness, meaning that “pleasure taken in listening to good music” cannot be considered a meaningful or intrinsically valuable element in a life in isolation of other factors. This counter-example is implausible to me. After discovering that someone important to one has died one’s reaction is often not what one would expect: one does not always break down into tears immediately or sink to the floor in despair. Often, but not always, while in a state of shock and disbelief one might continue doing quite normal things and having relatively normal reactions to things, including beautiful views or music. Often, but not always, the emotional reaction to a death takes days or even weeks to fully manifest, usually because of the shock such an incident causes. While people’s reactions to death differ, it is not clear to me that enjoying beauty immediately after such an event is in any way morally questionable or worthless. Even enjoying good music after murdering a busload of people would appear to add at least some meaning to a person’s life, granting that the serious immorality of such an action would detract from the meaningfulness of the life as a whole. That is, while murder can compromise meaningfulness, it does not appear to strip certain elements of their inherent meaningfulness completely, as Levinson seems to claim.

In my opinion the pattern of a life and the timing of its good and bad moments may in some cases enhance meaning slightly but not overwhelmingly. Thus it seems to me that there is some stability to the value of certain elements, at least meaning-wise, so that certain elements are meaningful regardless of the context (i.e. their meaningfulness cannot be cancelled out by other elements), and if the meaningfulness of these elements is affected by proximity of other elements or other relations to other elements, this is

another matter to be added to or subtracted from the overall meaning sum. In other words, “ordering of events” can be seen as another part of a life which adds meaning or detracts from it, in my opinion.

Besides the counter-examples used being unconvincing, a second problem with Levinson and Brännmark’s account is that they imply that it is very difficult to specify what kinds of lives are meaningful. If meaningfulness attaches only to “slices of lives”, then it appears that we need to know many details in order to assess whether a life is meaningful or not, and this seems counter-intuitive. Most people do not know very many details of Mother Teresa’s life, but the ones they do know, namely, of all the poor and sick people she helped, seem sufficient to enable them to judge that her life was meaningful. On Levinson’s account such people are misguided and should know many more details (in particular of timing of events) in order to be able to make such a judgement. However, some activities and achievements, such as helping the poor and sick on such a scale, are just so admirable that they cannot be undermined by the context. Brännmark argues that how we actually, in ordinary life, go about evaluating goodness of lives is by evaluating them as wholes, not by evaluating their parts,⁷¹ but again, this seems incorrect to me: again, we can take Mother Teresa as a case study. Many people know only that she was a nun who helped lots of sick poor people, and would probably if asked say that they consider her to have lived a meaningful life. They are not making this judgement based on considering her life as a whole-since they do not know enough information about her

⁷¹ Brännmark, ‘Leading Lives: On Happiness and Narrative Meaning,’ p. 330.

life as a whole. They are doing it based on considering just one part of her life: namely, her meaningful activity.

Thus it seems to me that Levinson and Brännmark place too much emphasis on the ability of other factors to influence the meaning-weight of certain elements, and that they are mistaken in thinking that certain factors can rule out the meaningfulness of certain (but only certain) meaningful elements, such as finding cures for terrible diseases. While such factors may enhance or detract from meaning, I think it is best to see them as another component in the bucket of meaning rather than necessary for meaning to attain at all, or calling into question the possibility that certain elements are meaningful in themselves. While factors such as intentions and environment sometimes can affect whether certain elements count as meaningful so that some meaningful elements in a life might be more like “slices of life”, it is still possible to identify elements that make a life meaningful regardless of the circumstances and where they are positioned relative to other elements: curing people of cancer and artistic achievement are among these. While identifying which kinds of elements are complexes, and how much meaning they carry relative to other elements, in particular stable elements, might be quite a complicated task, it seems right that we do not over-simplify the task of quantifying meaning, since meaning is not a substance.

If we assume that some elements in a life have stability in terms of meaning, how plausible is it to say that some of the kind of features associated with the narrative approach are elements that contribute meaning to a life? For one thing we might think

that these features are particularly important in terms of meaning: for example, Brännmark argues that the “narrative structure⁷²” of a life, or how events are positioned in a life, is one of the most significant differences between human beings and animals; i.e. for human beings events take on varying significance depending on their contexts so that their lives form “narratively structured wholes”,⁷³ and human beings know that they are somewhere along the path between life and death,⁷⁴ while animals do not. It is not the different contents that we are capable of filling our lives with that constitute the significant difference between us and animals,⁷⁵ according to Brännmark. However it seems to me that it *is* the different contents of our lives that mark the difference between us and animals: that is, our being capable of producing works of art, showing compassion or attaining knowledge (or some approximation to it) are more plausible reasons why human beings are different to animals.

Related to the question of whether a “container view” is plausible is the question of whether there are different “types” of meaning, such as “deep”⁷⁶ meaning, as opposed to shallow meaning. One could argue that deep meaning is only achieved when all relevant appropriate factors are in place, such as order and interrelation of events, and that without this only shallow meaning is possible. Is it the case that by “deep” people simply mean an extraordinary amount of meaning: in other words, are quantitative distinctions sufficient or must talk of meaning of life also take into account qualitative distinctions?⁷⁷

⁷² Brännmark, ‘Leading Lives: On Happiness and Narrative Meaning,’ p. 321.

⁷³ Brännmark, ‘Leading Lives: On Happiness and Narrative Meaning,’ p.322.

⁷⁴ Brännmark, ‘Leading Lives: On Happiness and Narrative Meaning,’ p. 333.

⁷⁵ Brännmark, ‘Leading Lives: On Happiness and Narrative Meaning,’ p. 322.

⁷⁶ Metz, “Recent Work on Meaning of Life,” p. 809.

⁷⁷ Metz, “Recent Work on Meaning of Life,” p. 810.

Or is it the case that deep and shallow meaning, or whatever other “types” of meaning there are, are intrinsically incomparable, such as oranges and elephants, and cannot be added up in the same way that an umbrella’s being blue and yellow do not make it green? If there are qualitative distinctions in meaning, then comparison of meaningfulness, if not impossible, at least becomes complicated, for example in cases where one person has a little deep and a lot of shallow meaning, and another has no shallow meaning but a little more deep meaning. It at least seems clear that “deep” meaning is intended to refer to cases of “better” meaning in some way, and it seems to me that to think of it in quantitative terms captures this superiority. It also seems to me that most of the time there can be a decision made about which life is the more meaningful one, and this suggests that a quantitative notion of meaning is the one we tend to use. In any event, for reasons of simplicity, I will assume that meaning comes in degrees, but not types.

Enhancements and meaning

If one then accepts the first premise that certain types of activities and accomplishments contribute meaning to a life, as well as the premise that by increasing the amount of these that one engages in one can increase the meaningfulness of one’s life, then one should accept that cybernetic enhancement can *ceteris paribus* add meaning to life. Cybernetic enhancement is one way of combating nature’s injustices that render some human beings relatively weak and incapable (even if they are not lacking capacities altogether, e.g. they are not blind or paralyzed, just very skinny or short-sighted or lacking good

coordination), and doing away with limitations that hold all human beings, including the most capable, back from certain meaningful lives. Since physical limitations are often what lie in the way of people and the possibility of (or at least the possibility of large amounts of) meaningful achievements and activities, cybernetic enhancement can, by lessening or eliminating these limitations, make possible degrees of meaning not previously available to naturally weaker individuals, as well as make possible extraordinary degrees of meaning to those who naturally possess great ability.

Thus it appears to me that cyborgs can have more meaningful lives than normal human beings, but only if the enhancements that they acquire are of a certain sort and are used in certain ways. Meaningful enhancements must allow for more meaningful activity and achievements than would have previously been possible, and must also be actually used for the proper purposes. If the enhancements are not actually *used* in the relevant ways, then having enhancements is akin to being born with a brilliant talent for running but choosing to watch TV instead. Thus the mere possession of certain capacities does not (in most cases) increase meaning-it is rather their use in meaningful pursuits that does.

Chapter Three

Overview

So far I have argued that cybernetic enhancements can (at least in some cases and given certain conditions) increase meaning in a life by increasing the amount and variety of meaningful behaviour a person is capable of. I have distinguished between meaningful activity and meaningful achievement, and I have provided a rough sketch of what it seems to me constitutes meaningful behaviour; namely that it develops or expresses what is most admirably human about us and that it involves real experiences. Lastly I have argued that it is plausible that one can increase the meaningfulness of one's life by

increasing the amount of meaningful parts it contains. In the following chapters I will consider objections to the view that cybernetic enhancements can increase meaning in a life by increasing the amount and variety of meaningful behaviour a person is capable of. In this chapter I will consider specifically whether enhancements would undermine or threaten the amount of meaning that internal goods (such as virtues) and aspects of experience (such as effort and suffering) contribute to our lives.

Could becoming a cyborg decrease meaningfulness of a life because cyborgs would be less likely to develop internal goods or expend effort?

Maartje Schermer points out that what we really value in practices such as sport and education are the internal goods that are developed through these means, for example, courage, perseverance, discipline, various skills, etc, and she claims that enhancements could threaten the development of these and hence might in some cases be impermissible.⁷⁸ This might appear to be a problem for my argument, since it is not obvious yet that cybernetic enhancements develop these kinds of goods. The examples I have so far considered have emphasised results on the world, or activity in the world, as opposed to goods internal to the person who acts on the world, such as virtues and skills⁷⁹. Since virtues and skills require rationality and in some cases the capacity for certain emotion, determining whether enhancements would encourage, or discourage, or even prevent the development of these goods seems to be important in determining whether such enhancements can contribute meaning to a life. If enhancements prevented

⁷⁸ Maartje.Schermer, "On the Argument that Enhancement is 'Cheating'," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 34 (2008): p. 88.

the development of these goods in a person, then that person would not develop their capacities for rationality and love as much as they could have had they not been enhanced.

For example, the security guard with an impenetrable synthetic skin and other enhancements that protect him from injury might be less likely to develop courage since the development of courage requires real danger to be present. Furthermore, he may have no need to develop the skill of kung fu – a skill he might have pursued had he needed to defend himself. A person lacking any courage whatsoever, or at least lacking any opportunity for showing courage, and a person lacking skills might seem to be less of a person, or to live an impoverished type of life, and one way to explain this impoverishment might be to say that he has less meaning in his life as a result of not developing certain internal goods (which in turn develop our capacities for rationality and certain emotion). If the damage done to internal goods by enhancements is extensive enough, then this may outweigh any meaning that the enhancements contribute in terms of making possible certain types of activity in the world.

Firstly, in reply, it is clear that at least some enhancements would not pose a threat to the development of internal goods. Many of the enhancements I have mentioned so far are unlikely to pose a threat to the development of internal goods as long as they are not bolstered by other enhancements: for example, wing prostheses on their own do not seem to pose a threat to the development of courage: someone with wings can still be shot down, and is still vulnerable to disease. Furthermore, many skills can be maintained if a

person chooses to keep honing them and only certain enhancements would make certain skills redundant (so that if a person develops his rationality or capacity for love to a considerable extent by developing a skill, perhaps since he particularly enjoys it and hence spends much time on it, he could choose to get enhancements that do not interfere with his developing this skill). It seems in fact that the cases that pose a threat to meaning by way of limiting the possibility of the development of internal goods are those that involve extensive enhancement.

Secondly, it seems to me that the internal goods that might be lost by getting enhancements are only instrumentally meaningful, so that the loss of these will not affect meaning substantially. I think it is plausible to say that some internal goods fall under a category which I will call “instrumentally meaningful states” and others under the category “finally meaningful internal states”. The latter are internal states such as compassion, wonder/awe, appreciation of beauty, understanding, love and inspiration, that are meaningful for their own sakes: in other words, we have reason to bring them about for their own sakes and not merely for the sake of other mental states or behaviour that they might bring about. Compassion, wonder/awe, appreciation of beauty, understanding, love and inspiration are not internal goods that seem to be threatened by enhancements: rather, in many cases these would seem to be developed further by enhancements. For example, with wings one might be able to see many beautiful views which could give rise to awe or wonder, special perceptual organs could allow one to appreciate beauty that would not be possible to appreciate otherwise, and memory devices would probably aid understanding, and possibly inspiration (since remembering

inspiring ideas in appropriate situations often accompanies being inspired). Distinct from these states are “instrumentally meaningful states” such as courage, forgiveness, recognition of wrongs, perseverance and discipline which we value because of the finally meaningful states that they bring about.⁸⁰ Through the development of instrumentally meaningful states more meaning is generally possible for a life since these states allow for opportunities for the development of finally meaningful internal states and the capacity for more meaningful behaviour. For example, by being persistent one is more likely to learn how to play an instrument well and thus develop one’s appreciation of beauty, and by being courageous one tends to be in a better position to save lives than if one is not. However, as long as these finally valuable internal states and meaningful behaviours can be brought about, it does not seem to me that there is *loss* in meaning if a life does not have instrumentally meaningful states. For example, the security guard who has fingers implanted in him that can accurately shoot stun darts into any intruders, as well as super-sensory organs that allow him to hear better and see better so that he is more likely to detect the presence of an intruder, will still save lives even if he lacks perseverance, discipline and courage (since he need not concentrate much in order to detect an intruder, very little danger is posed to him personally and he is well-equipped to respond if an intruder does appear) and could even spend his time reading great literature or listening to beautiful music without worrying that someone was trespassing.

Another thing that we seem to value merely as a means to more meaningful behaviour is effort, and again it seems to me that if this was compromised by enhancements, meaning

⁸⁰ I will be focusing mostly on effort and courage and assuming that the arguments I make about these also apply to the other instrumentally meaningful goods mentioned here.

would not be affected. That is, it seems that it is the goal towards which the effort is directed that confers meaning, not effort as such: can we really deny that the achievements of the brilliant mathematician or genius philosopher are meaningful because they were able to achieve them with hardly any effort? However, it seems that many would think that if enhancements eliminate effort, the meaningfulness that they produce would be undermined, at least to some extent, since many think that an achievement that “comes too easily” does not count as a meaningful achievement. According to William James, meaning in life comes from “the marriage...of some unhabitual ideal...with some fidelity, courage, and endurance; with some man’s or woman’s pains.”⁸¹ Another author who more recently emphasises the importance of effort in meaning is Larry James. James lists as one of the conditions for something counting as an achievement that it be difficult for the person who achieves it.⁸² Many theorists hold that effort plays an important role in the meaningful life and would probably conclude that if enhancements eliminated effort, this would be problematic for their meaningfulness.

Furthermore, effort is an aspect of experience that seems particularly likely to be threatened by enhancements. Cybernetic enhancements appear to decrease the amount of effort that would be required in order to perform certain activities or accomplish certain things. In fact, cybernetic enhancements seem to be *designed* precisely to reduce effort; Jean-François Lyotard claims that cybernetic enhancements “follow a principle...of optimal performance: maximizing output...and minimizing input”.⁸³

⁸¹ William James, *On Some of Life’s Ideals* (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 1900): p. 91.

⁸² Larry James, “Achievement and the Meaningfulness of Life,” *Philosophical Papers* 34 (Nov. 2005): p. 439.

⁸³ “Cyborg”.

The reason why I take effort and other internal goods to be merely instrumentally meaningful is that it appears that they only bring about meaningfulness in a life when used in order to bring about meaningful behaviour. We do not seem to have good reason to bring them about for their own sakes because they are only meaningful when directed towards meaningful behaviour. For example, effort is only meaningful when directed towards something meaningful like creating great art, rather than banging one's head against one's palm repeatedly where this brings about nothing further.

Do we have reason to think that virtues such as courage and other elements of experience such as effort are *not* merely instrumental so that their loss through enhancements is more serious than I have suggested up to this point? Christine Korsgaard gives us at least some reason, if not conclusive reason, to think this. In assessing her views I will be focusing mostly on the case of effort. Korsgaard argues that it is mistaken to conflate intrinsic value and final value, or extrinsic and instrumental value. That is, not everything that is valued as an end has intrinsic value and not everything that has extrinsic value is only valued instrumentally.⁸⁴ Rather, valuing things instrumentally or as ends in themselves are “ways of valuing”, while valuing things intrinsically or extrinsically means valuing them because of their inherently valuable properties or valuing them because of their relations to other things that are have inherently valuable properties respectively. Thus saying something has intrinsic value is to say it has goodness in itself, apart from its

⁸⁴ Christine Korsgaard, “Two Distinctions in Goodness,” *The Philosophical Review* 92 (2004): p. 169.

relation to something else while saying it has extrinsic value is to say its goodness comes from some outside source.⁸⁵

Korsgaard uses the example of a mink coat as something that can be valued as an end (that is, one need not value it solely as a means to keeping warm in cold conditions – if this were the case, then one could easily replace a mink with something else that does the same job and such a coat should hold the same value, but this is not the case), but the value of which comes from its extrinsic properties, since “were it not for the ways in which humans respond to cold, we would not care about [mink coats] or even think about them”.⁸⁶ If we assume that Korsgaard is right that such cases exist of things that are finally valuable, or good for their own sakes, but also extrinsically valuable – that is, finally valuable only under certain conditions, then do we have reason to think that virtues such as courage, effort, and skills are such things? If they are then perhaps their loss is more serious since they are not merely instrumentally meaningful.

An opponent may agree with me that effort has extrinsic value (and in this case the value in question is meaningfulness): that is, its value is conferred on it from another source, such as the conditions under which it occurs. In the case of effort, the relevant conditions are that the effort results in good outcomes such as saving lives as opposed to head banging. However, he could deny that it is only instrumentally valuable, and one reason to assert this might be to say that we do not only want to exert effort *for the sake of* what it will bring about: rather we want to exert effort for the sake of exerting effort, on

⁸⁵ Korsgaard, “Two Distinctions in Goodness,” p. 170.

⁸⁶ Korsgaard, “Two Distinctions in Goodness,” p. 185.

condition that what is brought about is meaningful. Thus effort is like a mink coat in that we value it extrinsically but also for its own sake.

I will try to determine whether this objection works by considering again the case of the mink coat. According to Korsgaard it has final value – we value it as an end in itself and not merely a means – and this can be seen by our reluctance to replace it with a parka coat, but nonetheless we value it extrinsically – not independently of the circumstances. If effort is a similar case, then we should want it for its own sake, not independently of the circumstances, but on condition that it is aimed towards meaningful behaviour⁸⁷ (and similarly with virtues and skills). If effort is only instrumentally valuable, then we should only value it for what it brings about, namely meaningful behaviour. In the mink coat case the test of whether the coat was merely instrumentally valuable was to ask whether we would be happy to replace it with something that brought about the same effects, namely warmth. Thus in the effort case, if replacing effort with something that would have the same effects is something we would gladly do, then effort is only instrumentally valuable. So, if we were to bring about meaningful behaviour by simply intending it, would we want to? Or would we want to exert effort too? If the latter is the case, then effort is finally valuable. It seems to me that in many cases we really wish that intention was all that was necessary to bring about meaningful behaviour (which explains the longing we might have sometimes that we could have abilities uploaded onto our brains, as in the movie *The Matrix*). Perhaps in cases where we would like to exert effort the

⁸⁷ Effort is clearly not *intrinsically* meaningful, since if it was, then effort alone and directed towards any behaviour would be sufficient to contribute meaning, and it is clear that this is not the case, since if it were then banging one's head against one's palm repeatedly would count as meaningful, and clearly it does not.

reason we would want to do this is to prove the strength of our intentions – to others as well as to ourselves.

One way to see that courage is not something we value for its own sake is that in a case where we imagine someone who achieves the same amount of meaning that the security guard does, but who is courageous too, there does not seem to be a good reason to want to be the second person over the first. While we may *in fact* prefer to be the courageous security guard if given the choice, this seems a bit odd if the courage has no role to play in any future situations. Wanting to be the courageous security guard in this case is akin to wanting to be someone who owns a cake that she can never eat rather than someone who does not. If the cake is to provide no nourishment or pleasure, then wanting to be the person who owns the cake seems pointless, or at least far less desirable than if eating it and getting pleasure out of it was a possibility. Similarly, courage that has no opportunity to be exercised since the person concerned has no reason to fear things, does not seem to be something worth having⁸⁸. The desire to be the (uselessly) courageous person is possibly explained by the fact that in our society we tend to hold effort in high esteem – but the reason for this seems to be that it tends to increase meaningful behaviour and as a result we have come to associate the two to a great extent.

One of the reasons why we might think that courage, perseverance and discipline do not seem to be meaningful in themselves (even if they are praiseworthy when they are appropriate in the circumstances) is that they require the presence of suffering in order to

⁸⁸ It is important to note that if courage were necessary in certain situations for a cyborg, then he would have the opportunity to develop it, assuming that danger is necessary for the development of courage.

be appropriate responses, and it would make no sense to bring them about for their own sake. Similarly it would make no sense to try to bring about forgiveness and recognition of the wrongs one is responsible for (since this would require bringing about suffering too), but, where they are appropriate, they are instrumentally meaningful since they tend to develop compassion and understanding, and since they might inspire meaningful activity such as helping others. The meaningfulness of these states arises from the goal towards which they are directed, such as meaningful behaviour or meaningful relationships, but since there is no reason to bring them about for their own sake, it seems they are merely instrumentally meaningful states.

An opponent could object to the claim that these states are only instrumentally valuable by providing an example of something that is finally valuable, such as an artwork, and that nonetheless can only be brought about through suffering (perhaps the model which the painting depicts was forced at gunpoint to sit where she sat, and this was the only way to capture the particular expression on her face). This case is presented not so much to suggest that sometimes there is *reason* to bring about suffering (even if doing so is wrong), if by doing so one is bringing about something intrinsically valuable, as to show that something can be finally good, or good for its own sake even if it requires bringing about suffering in order to bring it about. Thus, according to this objection, effort could be finally valuable, or valued for its own sake, even if it requires the existence of suffering in order to be meaningful.

In response it seems to me that even if there are possible cases where the fact that bringing something about for its own sake requires suffering does not prevent it from being finally meaningful, effort is nonetheless not one of these cases. The reason is that effort simply does not in itself justify the bringing about of suffering: it is simply not valuable enough unless it results in valuable outcomes such as increased mental or physical strength. If we were to bring about effort for its own sake we would need to create a situation in which effort was required, and this would probably require suffering since effort by definition seems to require some kind of strain. However, if this suffering that was required for exerting effort resulted in nothing meaningful (or otherwise valuable), it would be unjustified: it would be silly to bring it about. Conflicting intuitions on this seem to be caused by thinking that effort always does result in something good – such as increased strength of character or honing of the mind and body, but it is at least logically possible that one can exert oneself without bringing about anything good and it is this case that is relevant since I am considering whether effort can be meaningful apart from the meaningful behaviour that it is oriented towards. An example of a case where bringing about effort for its own sake where no further good could come of it is one where someone expended effort in not moving for two days. In such a case the person would probably, at least at some point, begin to suffer from frustration and severe muscle aches, and if effort were good for its own sake then it seems to me that such a person would gladly accept this. However, such a situation is one that most sane people would be very eager to avoid, barring very peculiar circumstances. If effort (and the accompanying strain and suffering) were meaningful for

its own sake, then it seems to me that we would have reason to want to do such things, but clearly we do not.

However, even if internal goods such as courage and perseverance are actually finally (though also extrinsically valuable), it is not clear that enhancements would eliminate the need for them. One of the reasons for this is that, as I have mentioned, most cyborgs will still be vulnerable, and this will require and therefore give opportunities to develop courage, and most cyborgs will still run up against obstacles to meaningful behaviour (such as complex decision making), and will thus need qualities such as perseverance. Furthermore, the acquiring of enhancements themselves seems to be one way in which these virtues can be developed, because getting an operation to acquire such enhancements would be frightening, and would reflect an admirable sacrifice (that is, of one's former appearance and the comforts of familiarity with one's body) for the sake of worthy pursuits and so would require courage. Having enhancements is likely to increase one's confidence as one's capacities increase, and this is likely to increase one's efforts to persevere. Thus even if one maintains that states such as courage and perseverance are finally meaningful, it would be unreasonable to argue that enhancements should be prohibited on those grounds since it is unlikely that after cybernetic enhancements the need for them will ever disappear completely, and this can at least be avoided by making sure that no one is ever enhanced to the point of invincibility. Similarly, even if one maintains that effort is not merely instrumentally meaningful, it is not clear that enhancements would eliminate the need for it. For one thing, it seems more likely that enhancements would require that we expend more mental effort, even if they would not

require as much physical effort. This is because the cyborg will have more abilities and thus more opportunities for action, and will hence need to do a lot of decision making about which meaningful behaviours he should pursue.

Is effort necessary for meaningful behaviour, and if so, how much is required?

Even if effort is not merely instrumentally valuable, if it turns out that it is necessary for meaningful behaviour, then the types of enhancements that could increase the meaning of one's life would be far less than what I have so far supposed, especially if a certain (substantial) amount of effort is required, and this is not a conclusion I would like to accept. Consider a case where a person acquires artificial fingers and a memory device that allow her to perform a beautiful concerto. Our initial response may be that this is not meaningful since it does not require effort.

However in other cases effort does not seem necessary for meaning. For example, a memory recorder could help a scientist to move quicker in his research and gain understanding that he would have been previously incapable of with little or no effort. Perhaps one of the reasons why we think the scientist need not expend effort in order for his activity to be meaningful is that the direct results of his research are only valuable as a means to technological or medical benefit, which is itself only instrumentally valuable – perhaps as a means of achieving greater general well-being for the population, or a situation in which people are capable of meaningful lives. However, in the case of the pianist, the activity itself is what is intrinsically valuable, and perhaps this is why we feel

that she should have exerted herself in order for her activity to count as meaningful.

Thus perhaps intrinsically meaningful behaviour requires effort.

However, if this were true, then it would seem that we would feel similarly about cases where the knowledge in question is valuable in itself: do we think in the case of knowledge of logical principles, or universal truths, that it is important that someone expend effort in attaining such knowledge? It seems to me that we do not. While the effortless philosophical genius may be annoying to his industrious colleagues, it seems mistaken to think that his understanding counts for less than theirs. This suggests that at least some cases of finally meaningful behaviour do not require effort.

In fact even the piano case does not seem to require effort in my opinion. It seems to me that while effort may enhance such a performance, the performance itself is meaningful as long as it is played with the right intentions and artistic understanding present in the person performing. If the piece is a mere mechanical recitation of notes, and not played with understanding and expression, then the audience will feel it, and the performance will lose its meaningfulness. This is assuming that the enhancements are sophisticated enough to allow a person to exert some control on the delivery of the piece, but this does not seem so far-fetched. In playing the piano, playing many of the notes becomes almost unconscious-much of the actual physical activity of playing the piano is learned by rote. Thus though the enhanced person would skip out some of the steps in being able to play the concerto, she would nonetheless be capable of expressing her understanding of the piece, and it is in this, and in the deliverance of the piece to the audience, that the meaning lies, in my opinion.

Thinking that effort is a necessary condition for meaning, or overplaying in other ways the role of effort in meaningfulness, seems to me to be explained by the fact that in the world as we know it most meaningful activities and achievements require effort.

However, it is misguided to conclude from this association that effort is always required for meaning. Thus it seems to me that effort is not a necessary condition for meaning, but something that sometimes enhances meaning, in cases where the effort is exerted for the sake of meaningful behaviour.

Is some kind of suffering, or at least the possibility of suffering, necessary for meaning?

If effort is not necessary for behaviour to be meaningful, is the possibility of some kind of suffering necessary? I will argue that it is not. However, many feel that the possibility that things could go horribly wrong and cause terrible suffering is a condition for our activities and achievements to be meaningful. William James describes a utopian society where everyone is safe from harm, intelligent and humane and there is nothing but order and ease, and argues that what is missing from this is “the element that gives to the wicked outer world all its moral style, expressiveness, and picturesqueness - the element of precipitousness...of strength and strenuousness, intensity and danger”.⁸⁹ To James, “[t]his order is too tame...this goodness too uninspiring. This human drama without a villain or a pang... this atrocious harmlessness – I cannot abide with them. Let me take my chances again in the big outside worldly wilderness with all its sins and sufferings. There are the heights and depths, the precipices and the steep ideals...”.⁹⁰ In other words, without suffering a life cannot be meaningful according to James, or at the very least, the

⁸⁹ James, *On Some of Life's Ideals*, p. 57.

⁹⁰ James, *On Some of Life's Ideals*, p. 55-56.

most important behaviour involves suffering or at least the possibility of it. Without danger and without the chance for failure, there is also no chance for heroism in such a world, and such a world consequently appears boring, since what inspires us is “Sweat and effort, human nature strained to its uttermost and on the rack, yet getting through alive”,⁹¹ and pointless. While suffering and effort are distinct, they are related concepts, since often exerting effort includes some amount of suffering.

However, it is one thing to read books about suffering and be inspired by the great feats of literary heroes, and quite another to be actually suffering terribly at the hands of villains, in the clutches of disease, or under extreme mental strain. It seems to me that while this suffering and strain may be satisfying to read about (particularly if it results in meaningful behaviour), and a great relief to survive, our enthusiasm for the genuine item is not very strong: in general we tend to avoid suffering as much as we can. While it seems to be common to think that terrible things happening to people can make them better people in some way, in many cases terrible events can decrease meaningfulness of a life rather than increase it, for example by robbing a person of his loved ones. Furthermore there are clearly cases of meaningful behaviour that require no suffering, such as creating some art.

However, there is reason to think that the lives of cyborgs would still include the possibility of suffering, i.e., cyborgs would still suffer, or be vulnerable to suffering, even if they would not suffer as much, or even if they would suffer in different kinds of ways from those who are unenhanced (for example from the mental anguish that results from giving up a limb). Thus, even if one accepts that the possibility for suffering is a

⁹¹ James, *On Some of Life's Ideals*, p. 58

requirement for behaviours to be meaningful, becoming a cyborg does not entail that one will thereby eliminate suffering from one's life.

Summary

In this chapter I have argued that cybernetic enhancements for the most part do not threaten the development of internal goods such as virtues and skills and aspects of experience such as suffering and effort. However, in the cases that they do, this is not particularly regrettable since, it seems to me, the types of internal goods or aspects of experience that are compromised are only instrumentally meaningful.

Chapter Four

Enhancements as tools and cyborgs as machine-like

In this chapter I discuss another objection to the claim that becoming a cyborg is one way to increase the meaningfulness of one's life, and focus in particular on the aspect of becoming a cyborg that seems particularly unattractive to many. For many the intuitive response to the idea of becoming a cyborg might be that there is something pointless or unnecessary, as well as disconcerting, about incorporating machines and our bodies to such an extent. One reason to think that enhancement is pointless or unnecessary, even if one grants that effort is only instrumentally meaningful and not necessary for meaning, is that cybernetic enhancements are akin to simply acquiring tools such as downloading better software, or buying a special suit or gadget that allow one more success in the activities that one undertakes. Thus one may conclude that behaviour carried out as a result of enhancements does not count as meaningful in the same way that winning a race with the aid of performance inducing drugs is not meaningful since in both cases it is dubious whether the behaviour can be attributed to the person. One reason why cybernetic enhancement might strike us disconcerting is that it appears extreme and unnatural and thus appears to render us machine-like, or to threaten our identity in other ways, so that it is preferable to simply buy tools rather than implant chips or replace working, but inferior body parts. In this section I firstly consider the similarity between enhancements and tools, independently of whether enhancements eliminate effort or not, and whether any similarities that are identified have negative consequences for the meaning contributed by enhancements. Secondly I consider how getting enhancements may affect our identities, as individuals and as a species, and whether this can prevent enhancements from contributing meaning to our lives, or at least severely decrease the amount of meaning enhancements can contribute to our lives.

Are cybernetic enhancements akin to acquiring tools or taking performance enhancing drugs and therefore not able to increase meaning in a life?

The first concern is that cybernetic enhancement would not count in terms of meaning for a person's achievements, since the cyborg would not be responsible in the right kind of way for the behaviour made possible by the enhancements. Thus the enhancements may be thought to be living our lives for us. Furthermore becoming enhanced may be considered cheating, at least in some sense: i.e. the artificial limbs or implanted gadgets cannot be factored into a person's achievement just as an athlete's taking performance enhancing drugs gives us reason not to assess an athlete's performance as her own. The recent debate in the newspapers over whether Oscar Pistorius should be allowed to compete against able bodied athlete's despite his artificial leg replacements suggests that some would not consider achievements acquired by these means as legitimate sources of meaning, since the outcomes of using such means would not count as achievements. The idea then is that for something to be an achievement of person S, S must be responsible for the achievement, but S is not responsible for whatever is accomplished by means of enhancements. Although I have argued previously that responsibility is not necessary for *some* meaning to accrue to one's life, as in the case of a scientist accidentally discovering a cure for a terrible disease, or the beautiful comatose woman, if cyborgs have only a weak degree of responsibility, the meaning that enhancements contribute to their lives might be far less than I would like to think.

Here the analogy with tools comes to the cyborgs' rescue. Just because I have written this paper with the aid of the computer does not mean that I cannot be said to be responsible for having written it, and just because someone uses a car to win a Formula one race does not mean that he is not responsible for winning the race. Computers and cars are tools that make possible things that were not possible without them, and a person's using them need not mean that no meaning can arise from the behaviour.

Scientists use all sorts of sophisticated tools in the process of making discoveries that can increase medical knowledge or knowledge of our world with the result of making other's lives better, and surely this work counts as no less meaningful for coming about in this way. Some enhancements might actually amount to cheating, or not be attributable to a person but this is only in certain contexts, for example if enhancements are used in sports in which effort is highly prized, where there is an assumption that competitors are unenhanced and in which there are rules against such enhancements (perhaps because such enhancements are only available to a select wealthy few).

Furthermore, since cybernetic enhancements are internal, they become a part of a person: they become as much a part of a person as a pace maker. However, unlike a pace maker, in cases where enhancements help to contribute meaning to life the enhancements are used by a person *intentionally* in aid of a certain meaningful behaviour. Thus enhanced behaviour is still attributable to the person, and not merely to the enhancements. More importantly, by *deciding* to get an enhancement, a person becomes responsible for the activity made possible. This is not the case where the activity is only possible as a result of luckily being born with good genes – in fact because of the decision involved, it seems that the meaningful behaviour might be even more attributable, but at least equally attributable, to the cyborg than the behaviour of people with lucky genes is attributable to them. In the case of other meaningful achievements, our acknowledgement of the achiever's responsibility for the achievement often arises from noting sacrifices the achiever has made; for example, the amount of time they spent training, or money spent acquiring tools that make possible certain experiments but acquiring enhancements also involves sacrifice, for example, of healthy limbs and of time spent acquiring enough money to purchase them.

Could loss of identity as a result of enhancement pose a threat to or decrease the meaning cybernetic enhancements may contribute to a life?

In this section I consider six ways in which a person's identity could be thought to be compromised by enhancements and whether this poses a threat for meaning by taking "Jack the Fireman Cyborg" as a case study.

The most obvious cases where becoming a cyborg would threaten meaning for reasons of loss of identity is where a cyborg becomes extensively enhanced. The kinds of examples of cyborgs that I have speculated about so far have sported one enhancement, but it is possible that a person could have two or even tens of enhancements. Given my view that more of certain activities can add meaning to life, and given that adding meaning to life seems to be something that most people have a strong desire to do, it would seem that I would think it reasonable, and many people would want to, get as many enhancements as possible. Extensive cases of enhancement are slightly (or, for some, particularly) chilling and are likely to inspire repulsion or aversion. Let us then imagine an über-cyborg – a cyborg who is vastly enhanced: Jack, the Fireman Cyborg. All his muscles have been replaced by synthetic muscles, his bones by synthetic bones, his blood by synthetic super-blood, his organs, one by one, by synthetic, long lasting, super organs. His memory has been amplified with the use of a memory recorder system, extra processing system, GPS system. Bit by bit this cyborg has become as cyborg-ed as possible, in the sense that all that is left untouched is perhaps his brain. Let us assume Jack does not need to eat or drink – he only needs to take injections. He is not vulnerable to disease, and is very unlikely to be killed, and likely to live for a very long time.

The first type of loss of identity I will consider is the most extreme type: that Jack becomes *essentially* other than who he was prior to enhancement. This might be the case if Jack's brain cells were replaced, so that a 'ship of Theseus' problem arises. However, one reason to think that becoming considerably other than what one is need not compromise meaning is that we tend to think that sacrificing one's life for one's friend *contributes* meaning to one's life (and clearly in this situation one becomes considerably other than what one was - i.e. dead). Since it may be meaningful to kill oneself under certain conditions, this type of loss of identity need not eliminate meaningfulness. If we assume that Jack was previously a concerned citizen in a country raged by terrible fires that were causing extensive loss of life, giving up his identity in order to best carry out this task seems to be a particularly admirable thing for him to do. The cases of losses of identity I will consider now are less extreme but may nonetheless also be thought of as compromising meaning.

When we imagine Jack, we imagine a synthetic looking creature with a steely look in his eye. The next worry I will address is that Jack has become other than what he is by becoming synthetic, or unnatural, and even getting fewer enhancements than Jack seems to be extreme. Since there is something unappealing about becoming even minimally synthetic and doing something as extreme as having a limb amputated, in some cases tools are preferable to getting enhancements. It would make no sense for someone to get an enhancement which made possible an activity that would have been made equally possible by a tool: for example, to implant a retractable toothbrush into one's finger would be silly. It would also be wasteful given the amount of labour and material needed to make such an implant effective. However, in many cases it seems that there are good reasons to get enhancements rather than tools, and where incorporating something unnatural into one's body is a small price to pay for the results. Pace makers are

synthetic, but people who need them accept this because they allow them to live. It would make sense to get cybernetic enhancements rather than tools when the activity it makes possible would make a huge difference for good in the world: e.g. would greatly reduce human suffering, and when these kinds of enhancements cannot be replaced by tools, or when they are vastly more efficient than tools, or when the technology required to make a tool that would make possible the activity that an implant would make possible is only likely to be acquired in the far off future. Getting wings used to rescue drowning people are an example of a case where it would make sense to get enhanced since wings would allow a person to fly close to the ocean or a flooded area and see people more easily than someone in a helicopter might, and it would also be a faster process than trying to rescue a person with a helicopter. Thus in the case of *certain* types of enhancements, the unnaturalness of the enhancement is a small price to pay given the meaning that could result.

Furthermore, cyborgs may seem unnatural because of the strange body shapes they may acquire from being enhanced. However, a certain body shape does not seem to be part of our conception of the most valuable things about human beings: for example, a hunchback is not considered less human merely because of his shape. Even people without limbs or lacking senses are not considered less “human”, in either sense that I have used it: for example, the drummer in the band Def Leopard, Rick Allen (who continued to play drums with one arm after his left arm was amputated) and Helen Keller are not considered alien, and are respectively considered to be leading and to have led exemplary lives. Thus the fact that enhancements might render people less natural or “human” looking would not undermine the meaningfulness they could contribute to a life. Though cyborgs like Jack might seem to resemble machines more than they

resemble human beings, *resemblance* to being human is not relevant to meaning on my account: as long as these cyborgs engaged in behaviour that count as most admirably human, the meaning of their lives would not be threatened, even if the aesthetic appeal of their lives were affected to some extent. While I argued earlier that being beautiful could add some meaning to one's life because of the experiences this could cause in others, being beautiful is certainly not necessary for meaning. Thus cyborgs would be human in the way that matters.

Considering Jack again, another thing that might bother some of us is that he may be lacking many of the skills that ordinary people tend to cultivate, for example, playing tennis. Thus the third worry is that Jack seems too goal-orientated, and too focused on one purpose. It might seem that there is some meaning in doing things that are all things considered trivial, such as eating ice cream, because this would be a nice contrast and because it would prevent slavishness to one or more goals. That is, there might be something admirably human about keeping a balance in one's life: being able to engage in a variety of meaningful behaviours, and furthermore not to prioritise one goal to the extent that other meaningful parts of a life suffer very badly.

However it seems to me that while keeping a balance in one's life and engaging in many varied activities may enhance meaning, particularly meaningful behaviour (such as curing diseases or producing great art) will contribute more meaning-wise. Many of the people whose lives we often attribute great amounts of meaning to are dedicated to a single purpose: for example, Mother Theresa was dedicated largely to the purpose of helping the sick and poor. Paul Edwards argues that what Pasteur, Lenin, Winston Churchill and Margaret Sanger have in common besides being clear examples of people

who have lived meaningful lives is that they “had some dominant, over-all goal or goals which gave direction to a great many of the individual’s actions”.⁹²

Some people who are too goal-orientated may be unpleasant to be around, but this in itself does not seem to threaten meaning too substantially. Even if there are cases where extreme goal directedness leads to a situation where a person is, as Cottingham describes, “cut off from the patterns of feeling that make us naturally disposed to have some minimal concern for our fellow creatures”,⁹³ or where a person’s meaningful relationships suffer, this does not threaten my general argument that enhancements can increase meaning in a life if used in certain ways, since this would be a way in which it would be unwise to use them in. Nonetheless, if we assume that cybernetic technology is likely to improve drastically, it is possible that we can build cyborgs in such a way that they are capable of many varied activities, and anyway getting enhancements does not in itself seem to predispose someone to stop engaging in other activities, rather this depends on his own choice.

A fourth worry for identity is that enhancements may threaten our identity in terms of turning us into creatures that can plan far more of their lives than has ever been possible for human beings. Thus the possibility of becoming enhanced would introduce a radically new capability to the human being. This kind of planning of one’s own life might seem objectionable in the same sense that planning the characteristics of one’s children through gene therapy seems objectionable to many and the main reason for these sentiments that springs to mind might be that people who do this are ‘playing God’, and

⁹² Paul Edwards, “The Meaning and Value of Life,” in E. D. Klemke, ed., *The Meaning of Life*, second edition (Oxford University Press, New York, 2000): pp. 143-144.

⁹³ Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life*, p. 28.

for some theists this may seem arrogant, or morally wrong. But another reason is that it might seem to interfere with the meaning that is contributed by these enhancements since it would make us so different from what we are.

However, perhaps this is a way in which we *want* to be different from what we currently are. Already we try to control our lives and appearances in many ways, and perhaps enhancement is just an extension of this. Furthermore perhaps enhancements present an opportunity for making more rational choices and thereby bringing about better results than one's genes have, and given my theory of meaning this might be an acceptable or even attractive way in which our identity would change as a result of enhancements.

A fifth point is that enhancements may eliminate the need for us to engage in activities that currently make up a large part of our lives. That is, someone might argue that even if cyborgs might develop to a greater extent what we most value about human beings, such as rationality, creativity and relationships, other aspects that are distinctive of human beings, even if they are not generally greatly esteemed, could be lost by cyborgs and this would be problematic for meaning since it would mean us becoming substantially other than what we are. For example, part of our concept of what it is to be human is the necessity of eating, drinking and having leisure time. Part of our concept of human children is that they have time 'just to be kids'. In the world now, without the possibility of sophisticated enhancement, these activities are such that without them human beings are likely either to stop functioning (by not eating or drinking), or experience difficulties in the world, for example, the social stresses of not learning to relate to and interact with

others easily which might result from denying oneself leisure time, or denying children the space to ‘just be children’. However, it seems that we might still value these activities for more than just their role in development of other valuable qualities since there seems to be something at least alien, and possibly a little repulsive about a human being who does not engage in these activities at all, even if they have the valuable qualities that these activities are supposed to foster.

In response perhaps one could side with the “Transhumanists” who believe that what it is to be human is not something that is fixed.⁹⁴ Here it is important to make clear that the kind of “humanness” at stake here is the kind tied to the human species, not the looser concept of “what is most admirably human”. While eating and drinking and ‘just being kids’ is part of our concept of the human being now, it needn’t be in the future. After all, human beings have evolved like other animals and are strikingly different from some of our more distant ancestors. Our environments have through technological advancement become more sophisticated so that while making a fire for warmth and hunting down food were necessities thousands of years ago, they are unnecessary for most people now. In general, life has become more comfortable in many ways since then, often owing to technological innovations that were often regarded with great suspicion at the time of their inventions. Thus, perhaps eating and drinking are destined to be outdated human characteristics, and we should not feel such anguish at their passing. Even if we do feel some discomfort about it now, perhaps this discomfort is merely a result of years of conditioning and will eventually disappear once we realise just how beneficial the

⁹⁴ Bernard Daly, “Toward a Brave New World?” *America* 191 (2004): p. 18.

enhancements are. Transhumanists think that the mere “humanness” of a trait is not a good reason to value it,⁹⁵ and that human limitations should be transcended.

A last way that identity could be threatened is if eliminating limitations through becoming enhanced could have the affect of changing what we value. Martha Nussbaum writes, “Our finitude, and in particular our mortality, which is a particularly central case of our finitude, and which conditions all our other awareness of limit, is a constitutive factor in all valuable things’ having for us the value that in fact they have.”⁹⁶ That is, “Gods are...dead to, closed off from, the value that we see, the beauty that delights us...from the struggle to do good work inside the constraints of a finite human life.”⁹⁷ If part of what we are is to be limited, and if not being limited or drastically decreasing the extent to which we are limited through becoming enhanced would exclude important meaningful things from our lives, or at least prevent us from finding them meaningful anymore, then it would seem we have no reason of meaning to become enhanced.

Firstly, in reply, it seems to me that cybernetic enhancements are unlikely to eliminate limitation altogether, as I have pointed out in the section on effort and suffering in Chapter Three, especially if the enhancements acquired are not extensive. Secondly, Nussbaum is particularly concerned with the limitation that death presents and seems to play a large role in how we value things on her account⁹⁸ but many cybernetic enhancements would not offer immortality or even prolonged life: rather they would offer the possibility of doing more with the time one has. Although this may also seem to upset (or at least change) the temporal structure of relationships and one’s life to some

⁹⁵ Alan Dacey, “The New Perfectionism,” *Free Inquiry* 24 (2004): p. 26.

⁹⁶ Nussbaum, “Mortal Immortals: Lucretius on Death and the Voice of Nature,” p. 336.

⁹⁷ Nussbaum, “Mortal Immortals: Lucretius on Death and the Voice of Nature,” p. 339.

⁹⁸ Nussbaum, “Mortal Immortals: Lucretius on Death and the Voice of Nature,” p. 341.

extent, it may be thought to do so to a lesser extent than immortality would. It seems possible to me that if limitations are reduced, as in the case of most enhancements, rather than eliminated, as in the case of those that offer immortality (and I will assume for the sake of argument here that such enhancements are possible), we would in fact be able to do more of what we value rather than losing our ability to value certain things that we currently find valuable. If this is the case, then there would be reason to avoid enhancements that offered immortality in favour of more humble ones that nonetheless would allow one to pack one's life full of more meaningful elements, and again enhancements not increasing meaning in one's life would depend chiefly on how one chose to use them, rather than on some problematic change in identity that they brought about. Thus it is not clear to me that *all* enhancements would affect our ability to value meaningful things in the way that we currently do, and so it does not seem that enhancements *necessarily* pose a threat to identity in the sense of fundamentally changing what we value.

Chapter Five

What are the ethical implications of cybernetic enhancements and will these undercut any meaning that enhancements may contribute to a life?

A problem with enhancements that is often dramatised in movies about enhanced beings, for example, *The Incredible Hulk* and *Iron Man*, is that as much as these superior powers can be used for the good, and to increase meaning, they can also be abused and used to harm others. In *The Incredible Hulk*, a soldier is injected with a substance that makes him just as, if not more, powerful than the Hulk. The soldier then goes on to create mayhem and destruction. In *Iron Man* an evil man who gets hold of the technology necessary for making an iron man suit creates similar suits with the intention of becoming more powerful and to gain financially, not to serve the greater good. While Iron Man might not be a cyborg, theoretically speaking, it is easy to see that just as wings can be used to save flood victims, they can also be used for kidnapping, and just as synthetic muscles can be used by super-firemen to lift heavy objects off people and carry them out of burning buildings, they can also be used by evil people to kill people. The problem of the possibility of evil scientists getting hold of the technology, or good scientists being overpowered by evil men with powerful weapons, is one that would need to be taken seriously in deciding whether enhancement technology should be developed, and just who should be enhanced. In this section I consider how acting immorally or living in an immoral society could negatively affect the amount of meaning that enhancements are

capable of contributing to a life as well as some of the negative ethical implications of enhancements and how society could go about trying to mitigate them.

The lives of people who do not use enhancements in morally acceptable ways are unlikely to increase in meaning. This possibility does not *prima facie* threaten my thesis, since I am only defending the view that enhancements that are used in *certain* ways will be candidates for increasing meaning, but noting this fact helps to clarify further what I mean by “certain” ways, rather than others. Given that meaning is a category of value, it is perhaps not surprising that we are hesitant to attribute meaning to the lives of people that we do not value. Cottingham notes, “It would certainly not be a very natural use of our language to bestow the epithet ‘meaningful’ on the life of the angry, resentful, greedy, ambitious, selfish [person]”.⁹⁹ In fact we tend to think of immorality as a meaning-detractor and this is consistent with my theory of meaning. For example, Hitler does not seem to me to have had a meaningful life. Even if his life might be described as “significant”, this would be meant in the sense of having a significant (negative) impact on the world, not in the sense of developing or expressing what is most admirably and valuably human. In fact, Hitler appears to have had a life particularly lacking in meaning. Apart from the fact that he seemed to have engaged in very little meaningful behaviour, the morally abhorrent things he did almost certainly undermined what meaning his life did have because they did not develop his rational and emotional capacities and most importantly because they prevented so many people from exercising *their* capacities for rationality and love. Thus if getting enhancements is immoral, any

⁹⁹ Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life*, p. 23.

meaning that they may have contributed by being used for meaningful behaviour might be undermined by the decrease in meaning brought about by preventing others from developing their capacities for rationality and certain emotions as well as not expressing these values in one's own (immoral) behaviour. If enhancements had an over-all negative impact on society that seriously limited the amount of meaningful behaviour most people could engage in (for example, that allowed a majority of the population to suffer from poverty by using state funds for developing cybernetic technology rather than poverty alleviation), then this could have the result of seriously decreasing the amount of meaning enhancements could contribute to anyone in that society since anyone who became enhanced in such a society would be implicitly showing disregard for the development of rational and emotional capacities generally (assuming that people preoccupied with survival would have little time or opportunity for developing these capacities). I would like to avoid the conclusion that cybernetic enhancements could increase meaning in our lives to such a negligible extent, and so it would be useful to know how such a situation could be avoided.

One way to avoid the possibility of people using enhancements for evil ends is to ensure that there are intensive physical and mental tests administered to anyone seeking enhancements. This might not eliminate risk altogether, but if all reasonable measures are taken in the development and protection of the technology, the remaining risk would probably be worth the possible benefits of enhancements to the world.

Another danger that would need to be dealt with by the use of intensive tests is that some people could get carried away and obsessive about getting new enhancements just as

some people get carried away and obsessive about getting plastic surgery. This kind of focus on enhancements for the sake of vanity, that is, for the sake of being better than others, is likely to seriously detract from the meaning that enhancements are able to contribute to lives. One reason is that such an attitude betrays a lack of commitment to the good, and rather a commitment to elevating oneself, something that is morally objectionable since it is likely to prevent the person in charge from acting morally, or at least virtuously. Another reason why vanity and obsessiveness could detract from meaning is that meaningful relationships would probably be compromised if people started getting competitive about enhancements. Again, the best way to prevent this would seem to be testing for appropriate candidates for enhancements.

Can enhancements undermine meaning by being morally questionable in terms of fairness?

Just who is allowed to be enhanced and under which conditions is a question that people are likely to be very concerned about, if powerful cybernetic enhancements become a real possibility. Schermer suggests that one reason to think that enhancements should be impermissible both in sport and in education is that it amounts to “cheating”,¹⁰⁰ where cheating is defined as breaking the rules and thereby gaining an unfair advantage. Enhanced beings might have more opportunities for meaning, which might seem morally suspect, and there are many other areas where enhancements could provide a significant advantage for cyborgs over unenhanced people, for example in terms of pleasure or power. It seems safe to assume that rules need to be just or at least appropriate ones if

¹⁰⁰ Schermer, “On the Argument that Enhancement is ‘Cheating’,” p. 85.

breaking them is to be considered particularly morally bad, so the important question here is whether it is particularly morally bad for someone to get enhancements that provide advantage to those who are enhanced. If so, then there is good reason for there to be rules against enhancements. Furthermore, if it is particularly morally bad to do things that provide one with greater opportunities, then the meaning that arises from such a choice might be undermined by the immorality of the choice.

In school situations we might think that the unfairness of getting enhanced results from there being a violation of the understanding that those who are competing are unenhanced – i.e. an understanding that what is being tested and compared in races and tests are pupils' unenhanced abilities. However, outside such competitive forums the matter of whether an advantage counts as “unfair” seems to depend both on whether other people have access to it, and on whether there is particularly bad deprivation caused in the process of an individual's getting enhanced. It seems to me that it would only be particularly unfair, and thus morally bad, to get enhancements that place one at an advantage if the advantages attained through being enhanced deprives others of important goods and if the good impact one makes on the world through their use is not considerable. If the enhancements are used for meaningful behaviour, the other advantages (such as power or pleasure, or at least less pain) that may come along with them might be acceptable, even if they are not available to everyone, since meaningful behaviour tends to have a positive effect on the world and the lives of other people. For example, many people do not resent vocalist Bono from the band *U2* for having the

advantages of fame and wealth since he uses both his fame and wealth for charitable projects.

However, as I mentioned in the beginning of the section, it seems that deprivation of important goods may well be a result of people getting enhancements. Many have expressed concern that cybernetic enhancement will exacerbate social inequality since they would presumably only be available to a certain income bracket and because government resources would be directed here instead of towards the more pressing needs of the poor. This again could mean a loss of meaning for those who get enhanced if one accepts Ronald Dworkin's claim that advantages that result from injustice tend not to enhance meaning.¹⁰¹

There seems to be good reason for the government to subsidize enhancements for everyone, but the plausibility of this will depend on how much these enhancements will cost, and it seems that they are likely to cost a lot. For these reasons, and because of the possibility of abuse of enhancements (that is, their use for evil ends), it seems to me that the process of allowing or subsidizing enhancements needs to be based on a rigorous testing of a person's commitment to good, and to the particular activity or achievement that the enhancement will help to make possible. With the use of advanced lie-detector tests and personality questionnaires, hopefully some of this risk can be eliminated. Some inequality may be worth the amount of meaning that will be created by only some people using these enhancements, and it would be reasonable for people to accept that only some people be given the enhancements if everyone, and especially the worst off, are likely to

¹⁰¹ Richard Dworkin: "Equality and the Good Life," *Sovereign Virtue: The Theory and Practice of Equality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000): p. 264-267.

benefit from them indirectly through the impact of cyborgs on the world (for example, lives saved or art produced).

Cybernetic enhancements could also be thought to have negative ethical implications because the development and manufacture of such technology is forecast to cause terrible environmental damage.¹⁰² Having such a negative impact on the world is bound to decrease meaningfulness of a life according to many accounts of meaning in life, especially utilitarian conceptions,¹⁰³ that connect meaning with having a positive effect on the world. There is space on my account too for this view since a negative effect on the world can include bringing about conditions under which it is more difficult to develop one's admirably human capacities, for example conditions of pollution, scarcity of resources or political turmoil. However, even if the manufacture of enhancements is costly to the environment, cyborgs might be able to reduce some of this damage. For example, enhanced firemen could put out fires and save the environment some of the damage the fire would have caused. Some have suggested that nano-technology will be capable of remedying some of our most pressing problems, including world hunger and environmental damage,¹⁰⁴ so in this way at least some of the negative consequences of cybernetic enhancement could conceivably be reduced or eliminated, especially if super-scientists with memory implants are working in the field. Certainly these are risks, but given the state of the world currently, it seems reasonable to take a few risks if the results are sufficiently likely and if they can result in as much good as it appears enhancements might result in.

¹⁰² Michael Giancola, "Does Transhumanism Mesh with Humanist Values?" *The Humanist* 64 (2004): pp. 35-36.

¹⁰³ Thaddeus Metz, "Utilitarianism and the Meaning of Life," *Utilitas* 15 (2003): pp. 52-53.

¹⁰⁴ Carl Elliott, "Humanity 2.0," *The Wilson Quarterly* 27 (2003): p. 16.

Chapter Six

Would obtaining cybernetic enhancement not increase meaning in life since eliminating certain disabilities does not?

Some parents of deaf children, and especially deaf parents, oppose allowing young children (and especially babies) to get cochlear implants. One reason for this seems to be the conviction that the life of a deaf person, while different, is no less meaningful than that of a hearing person, since “not every limitation is a loss”.¹⁰⁵ If a life lacking a capacity altogether can be just as meaningful as one not lacking it, then surely a life with enhanced capacities is no more meaningful than one with unenhanced ones. In this section I will be considering why one might think that a deaf person’s life would not increase in meaning after she had a cochlear implant, and argue that these reasons are consistent with thinking that enhancements can, in certain cases, contribute meaning to a

¹⁰⁵ Anita Silvers, “People with Disabilities,” in Hugh LaFollette, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Practical Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): p. 307.

life. I conclude that while a deaf person's life need not be less meaningful than a hearing person's life, it does not follow that enhancements cannot add meaning to life.

What reason is there to think that the life of a deaf person is no less meaningful than that of a hearing person other than reasons previously given? One of the reasons that disability rights theorists point out is that the unique phenomenology of certain disabilities¹⁰⁶ would be lost with cochlear implants, and it seems that, analogously, cybernetic enhancement might also be guilty of homogenization¹⁰⁷ since it would seem to raise abilities of those who underwent it to the same level. In other words, there is the possibility of the loss of certain perspectives on life. People's problem with this might be similar to the kind of problem that some people have with the loss of certain languages and cultures: in other words, it seems to be driven by the intuition that there is value in diversity and variety for its own sake. This is also arguably one of the reasons we have for attempting to conserve wild environments: to conserve the diversity of life to be found in them.

However, given the scope of possibility for enhancements, it may actually be the case that more variety of human beings would be created because of the variety of purposes for which enhancements can be acquired: some people might get wings, others tails, some might trade their body parts for smaller ones in order to fit into small spaces, while others might choose to become giants. My opponent could argue that as the problems of the world are slowly combated, and as technology improves there will be less need for a

¹⁰⁶ Vivienne Muller, "Constituting Christopher: Disability Theory and Mark Haddon's 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time,'" *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature* 16 (2006): p 124.

¹⁰⁷ Silvers, "People with Disabilities," p. 310.

variety of implants, and cyborgs will all become super-men with near-to-invincible and alarmingly similar looking bodies and consequently have similar perspectives on the world. There does seem to be some plausibility to me in the intuition that diversity is valuable, but I do not think that homogenization is inevitable, since it could be prevented by those who are in charge of authorising enhancements. Furthermore, it seems that it would be possible for *more* variety of perspective to be created by enhancements since people could experiment with different perspectives by swapping enhancements (here I am thinking mostly of sensory enhancements). For example, people could conceivably even choose to be deaf for a while and then get hearing implants. Thus homogenisation of perspectives is not inevitable. For reasons of diversity it should not be the case that enhancements ever become compulsory: thus if blind people chose to remain blind, they will be free to do so.

Furthermore, parents of deaf children argue that the relationship between them and their child would suffer were the child to get cochlear implants, since the child would be less likely to learn sign language, and thus less likely to communicate with her parents. Here it seems that the threat to meaningfulness, which could be expected to find a parallel with cybernetic enhancement, is that relationships might be put under pressure or damaged. In the case of enhancement the reasons might be a failure to relate to the “enhanced” person, jealousy or feelings of inadequacy from the “unenhanced” person, as well as competitiveness, as I have already mentioned in the previous chapter. Thus it seems possible that unequal distribution of cybernetic enhancement could bring about less meaningful relationships.

Government subsidy of nationwide enhancement may help to avoid this. Anyhow, jealousy, competitiveness, failure to relate and feelings of inadequacy arise in the world as we know it today without the kinds of enhancements we have been discussing because of natural gaps in abilities of people. If enhancements are only given to people on the basis of their displaying commitment to the good and to the activity in question, any hostility of others towards enhanced people would seem to be misplaced. Enhanced people would not have acquired such enhancements due to being blessed with good genes, or at least, their acquiring enhancements would be less dependent on their genes as on their current beliefs and intentions. Even if beliefs and intentions are to an extent shaped by genes and upbringing, chance at least plays less of a role than it seems to play in people being born with amazing athletic skill, for example. Being born with talent is less admirable than having a strong commitment to the good. For this reason, I think that instead of jealousy, people are more likely to feel admiration towards cyborgs, and to feel inspired to strive to develop a similar commitment in themselves. Feelings of inadequacy, competitiveness and failure to relate to cyborgs might be inevitable in some people, but are a small price to pay for the meaning contributed by cyborgs.

Another way to argue that the life of a deaf person is no less meaningful than that of a hearing person is to argue, as E.M. Adams does, that a life is meaningful to the extent that a person fulfils her potential and makes use of her capacities.¹⁰⁸ Similarly to Adams, Ronald Dworkin argues that it is not the specific circumstances of a person that are

¹⁰⁸ E. M. Adams, "The Meaning of Life," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 51 (2002): p. 80.

important for meaningfulness, but rather how the person responds within these.¹⁰⁹ On Adams' view cybernetic enhancements would make no difference to the meaning of the lives of ordinary people, since what is important is to fulfil one's own potential, not to compare one's performance to other superior or even average human beings. On this view cyborgs' lives would not increase in meaning either, since an increase in meaning would depend on their making better use of whatever capabilities they had, enhanced or unenhanced, not on whether they had more capabilities or not.

However, this view seems implausible to me since I think it is natural to attribute more meaning to people like Mother Teresa and Gandhi's lives than those of ordinary people, and it is clear that many people do not have the capacity for self-sacrifice that these people do. According to Adams' theory Mother Teresa and Gandhi's lives might be even less meaningful than the life of someone who achieved less than them, but who achieved a higher percentage of what she was capable of achieving, and this seems unintuitive.

Another way to see this is to consider Metz's case of someone who was captured and imprisoned in a cage. On Adams' view this person has a very meaningful life since he is achieving exactly what he is capable of given the circumstances: namely, extraordinarily little.¹¹⁰ People have different capacities and it seems in some cases that those who have more capacity for meaningful behaviour than others do, and actually use this capacity, will have more meaningful lives than those who have inferior capacity, even if the latter fulfil their potential to the fullest.

¹⁰⁹ Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue: The Theory and Practice of Equality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000): p. 260.

¹¹⁰ Thaddeus Metz, "Imperfection as Sufficient for a Meaningful Life: How Much is Enough?" in Yujin Nagasawa and Erik Wielenberg, eds., *New Waves in Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): p. 8.

It is more admirable, and often more morally admirable, to respond in certain ways rather than others to particularly terrible situations, or to use what capacities we do have as much as we can, even if they pale in comparison to those of others. Thus I would not deny that such lives have meaning. However, situations such as living under a brutal dictatorship or having to live with a particularly debilitating disease nonetheless seem to be serious meaning detractors, as I have argued in Chapter Two, p. 36.

Lastly, a clear reason why it is not the case that simply by lacking a capacity deaf people have less meaningful lives is that deaf people can make up for any lack of meaning that deafness may bring about in other ways, for example, by including other meaningful elements such as meaningful relationships. The more a deaf person uses the capacities he does have for meaningful behaviour, the more likely he is to increase the meaning of his life. Even though deaf people need not have less meaningful lives than those with hearing, it does not follow that cyborgs have less meaningful lives since what is important is that a life contain valuable elements, not that a life have a certain *number* of capacities. Thus, less capacities need not entail less meaning in a life, but not using the capacities one does have, or only using these to a weak degree so that one's life does not include meaningful elements, does entail that a person will have a less meaningful life.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that certain cybernetic enhancements, when used in certain ways, could increase the meaningfulness of one's life. I have argued that activities and achievements are meaningful in virtue of expressing or developing what is most admirably or valuably human about us, and that by engaging in more meaningful activities and achieving more meaningful results, one can (in many cases considerably) increase the meaningfulness of one's life. I have argued that enhancements need not eliminate the need for effort, virtues or skills, or decrease any meaningfulness these elements add to our lives. I have also argued that they need not render us other than what we are in such a way that undermines their meaningfulness. I have considered whether becoming a cyborg would be in some way immoral and thus not increase the meaningfulness of one's life and have concluded that even if this is sometimes the case, this does not undermine my argument since I am only committed to the claim that *certain* behaviour made possible by enhancements can increase meaningfulness of a life. Lastly I have argued that the meaningfulness enhancements can contribute to lives need not be undermined by the common intuition that meaningfulness depends on how one responds within the circumstances presented to one. Thus I hope to have shown that there is no reason why becoming a cyborg cannot, in certain cases, increase the meaningfulness of a person's life.

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