

Motivational Enhancement and Praiseworthiness

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A number of philosophers have provided persuasive responses to the charge that biomedical enhancement of capacities is cheating. Counterarguments tend to point out that 1) natural capacities are not fairly distributed and 2) the agent still needs to put in the effort necessary to reap the benefits of the enhancement. Agents' claims to praise are accordingly unaffected; their achievements not undermined. Neuroscientists have recently suggested that plausible biomedical enhancers are more likely to enhance not capacities, but motivation. If this is true, then the cheating objection (and its more nuanced variants) must be revisited, since motivational enhancements, unlike capacity enhancements, may significantly reduce the need for effort. We revisit the 'no pain, no gain' objection in the context of motivational enhancement. Examining possible effects of biomedical enhancements on intrinsic motivation ('enjoyment') and extrinsic motivation ('grit'), we suggest that possible effects which reduce or eliminate the need for effort force us to reconsider the fundamental grounds for praise. We argue that, contrary to widespread intuition, effort is in fact not the fundamental ground for praise. Rather, it is a good but fallible proxy for more fundamental grounds: the agent's choice and (often costly) commitment to pursuing worthwhile achievements. Following Aristotle, our analysis reveals that, more broadly, 'active' agency is the relevant domain for assessment of praiseworthiness. Motivational enhancement would only remove the grounds for praise if it rendered an agent sufficiently 'passive' with respect to her achievement. Throughout, we emphasize the importance of a diachronic perspective on active exercise of agency, to include training, prior planning and consciously employed strategies to overcome weakness of will, even where this reduces the need for effort.