

ing that question, the previous two are rather nonsensical, as if someone said, "I think we should make better cellphones, but I don't know what a cellphone is, and knowing what a cellphone is does not matter to its improvement." On the contrary, no one can improve what he cannot identify. If an engineer does not know the difference between an iPhone and a Samsung or if he cannot distinguish among variants of those types, his tinkering will probably turn the phone into a brick instead of a best seller. Buchanan's question, beyond humanity, asks if we can cross a line while saying that we do not know where the line begins or ends or even whether a line exists at all. Without a thorough and accurate knowledge of the thing's nature, we will find, like the ignorant engineer with the cell phone, that improvement will be limited and eventual

destruction will be likely. Whether or not the benefits are worth the risks, Buchanan's thought-provoking work deserves careful consideration.

REV. EZRA SULLIVAN, OP

Rev. Ezra Sullivan, OP, STD, currently teaches moral theology at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome.

1. Julian Huxley, "Transhumanism," in *New Bottles for New Wine* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), 14, 17, original emphasis.

2. Abigail Tucker, "How to Become the Engineers of Our Own Evolution," *Smithsonian Magazine*, April 1, 2012, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/>.

3. Allen Buchanan et al., *From Chance to Choice: Genetics and Justice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 30, 31.

Unfit for the Future: The Need for Moral Enhancement

by Ingmar Persson and Julian Savulescu

Oxford University Press, 2012, paperback, \$27.95

160 pages, bibliography and index, ISBN 978-0-19-870792-9

In this book, authors Ingmar Persson and Julian Savulescu concede that the well-being of the human race depends on socioeconomic factors as well as civil rights and liberties. However, despite the global emphasis on political equality, they anticipate a future global catastrophe. First, the unmitigated efforts of societies, primarily in the West, to maximize their wealth and consume natural resources have triggered climate change, which will have terrible consequences for the world's population, especially the poor. Second, affluent nations that continue to raise their standards of living by misusing natural resources make it more difficult for emerging economies to acquire the food, water, and other natural resources needed for survival. Third, given the relatively easy access that many nations have to atomic and biological weapons, the possibility of doing the "ultimate harm" to

the whole world is more proximate than remote, either in retaliation against exploitative nations or in a bid to secure resources.

According to the authors, there are two solutions to this dire situation. First, there should be a movement to enhance the moral education of the masses. Second, this should be accompanied by a research program to discover pharmaceuticals that can enhance the morality of persons and, eventually, their governments. Prozac already prevents hostile feelings among former prisoners and individuals suffering from major psychoses, and oxytocin is being used to treat certain types of depression, for example, enhancing mothers' empathy for their babies. Likewise, steroids, Ritalin, and modafinil can affect mood, memory, and performance. This sounds unrealistically utopian. Changing the feelings of humankind through chemicals to

make citizens more altruistic, empathetic, and sympathetic does not take away our freedom to be selfish. Moreover, from a Thomistic and Catholic perspective, this attempt to influence virtue does not *ipso facto* cause upright behavior. Given human nature's propensity for selfishness and our drive for immediate satisfaction and pleasure, it will be difficult to restrain human conduct simply by increasing punitive taxes or by providing economic incentives for moral behavior. Experience shows that even with good parenting, love of study, and the arts, all dispositions toward good behavior do not eliminate an individual's ability to impede grace and virtue by choosing evil.

The authors are secular ethicists who have little appreciation for religion. Not surprisingly, they approach social and ecological problems exclusively from a utilitarian perspective. However, Pope Francis shares many of Persson and Savulescu's concerns in his encyclical *Laudato si'*. The contrast is instructive. Francis writes, for example, "Only by cultivating sound virtues will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment." He also notes that "the current global situation engenders a feeling of instability and uncertainty, which in turn becomes 'a seedbed for collective selfishness.' When people become self-centred and self-enclosed, their greed increases. The emptier a person's heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume."¹ Persson and Savulescu would probably concur with the Pope, but their chosen means of using pharmacological agents to change human nature is thin and superficial. In contrast, Francis challenges believers to undergo a deep transformation to heal the wounds that come from original and personal sin. The capital vices at the root of our social and ecological crises are dispositions that cannot be removed or conquered without personal effort to push back against them. In many cases, these vices are so deeply rooted in our personalities that they can only be healed through prayer and fasting.

While *Unfit or the Future* contains needless repetitions, it draws out certain key

elements of what theologians would call the individual and population effects of original and personal sin. Of interest to the Catholic moral theologian, Persson and Savulescu's insights into human behavior demonstrate a novel way of describing the effects of sin that is rarely, if at all, found among Thomistic theologians. These include the following observations: it is easier to do great harm or damage to others than to benefit them; empathizing and sympathizing with individuals is natural, while empathizing and sympathizing with collectives is not (other than in one's own country, perhaps); it is easier to damage the earth than to improve it; it is difficult to make immediate sacrifices for future unknown gains that may only be of small benefit; we are less inclined to be good Samaritans if there are other people around (bystander apathy); and the status quo has such a strong hold on our personalities that change is not always pleasing, even when there are good reasons for it.

The authors make a case for influencing a person's growth in empathy, sympathy, and a sense of justice by complementing moral enhancement with bio-enhancement and genetic engineering. They are convinced that this approach will change human beings from selfish individuals to people who will intuitively recognize the importance of caring for other people and for the earth. They admit that this may take many decades to achieve, if it is even possible. As a person of faith, I find this naive because virtuous persons are individuals who can integrate their emotions in accordance with right reason. It is not a matter of feeling less or more, but of feeling less or more at the right time, at the right place, and in the right manner. Drugs may help us do the former, but they cannot really help us achieve the latter.

REV. BASIL COLE, OP

Rev. Basil Cole, OP, STD, is a member of the Pontifical Faculty at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, DC.

1. Francis, *Laudato si'* (May 24, 2015), nn. 204, 211.