

may be some borderline cases where it is unclear whether a being has this capacity, but in most cases it should be clear whether or not a being has it and its having the capacity should make a world of difference.

If a being has this capacity, then there are a number of important moral implications for how it may be treated. One must not treat such a being as an object to be manipulated; one must instead reason with it. Coercing it will only be justifiable if certain conditions are met, conditions that acknowledge the fact that this being can be reasoned with. It will also be appropriate and in some cases even obligatory to hold the being responsible for actions or omission. I have difficulty understanding how merely having the capacity for accountability for reasons to a higher degree—no matter how high that degree—could have moral implications of this kind or of comparable importance.

Quite apart from the fact that I do not think DeGrazia's canine example makes his point, I have another worry about his characterisation of post-persons. It seems to me that he faces an uncomfortable dilemma. Either he is committed to giving up the idea of a threshold, holding instead that for any two beings who have the capacity for accountability for reasons, the one with the greater capacity has a higher moral status; or he retains the threshold notion but must acknowledge that he lacks an account of where the threshold is. Without an account of the threshold, he has not made the case for the possibility of a higher moral status than that of persons, unless he is willing to give up the

threshold notion and embrace the counterintuitive implications of the view that there is an indefinitely large number of moral statuses corresponding to different degrees to which individuals possess the capacity for accountability for reasons. It seems to me that we are on firmer ground judging that a being either is amenable to reasons or is not, than in judging that some being who has this capacity has it in such a higher degree that they have a higher moral status.

Let me conclude with an observation about the debate on moral status and enhancement. It is important to distinguish three questions, all on the assumption that we can make sense of the idea of post-persons.

1. Would the advent of post-persons harm mere persons?
2. Would the advent of post-persons wrongly harm mere persons?
3. Should we, who are mere persons, try to avoid the advent of post-persons?

Many people seem to assume that the answer to the first question is affirmative. That is not so clear, however. Much will depend upon how morally enhanced post-persons are. The beings DeGrazia characterises as post-persons are very morally enhanced. Perhaps if such beings arose in our world or landed here from other regions of space, they would solve many of our problems. And if they are really morally enhanced, they will not exploit us if exploitation involves wrongful use or injustice. They will also presumably appreciate the attachment we feel to our present status and to our present scope for self-determination and this will limit their

paternalism towards us. On balance, giving up our assumption that we are at the top of the hierarchy of moral statuses might be a good bargain if they treated us in this enlightened way. As to the second question, suppose that the advent of post-persons was detrimental to our interests on balance. It would not follow from this that we had been wronged. Instead, perhaps we would simply no longer enjoy certain privileges that we do not now deserve. Given my sketch of the answers to the first and second questions, it is not the case that the answer to the third question is obviously affirmative, as many have thought. If the threshold of moral excellence for post-persons is high enough so that they would have an enlightened view of the interests of mere persons and a sense of obligation to further those interests—and if we could avoid a transitional phase between mere persons and post-persons that would be so insufficiently morally enhanced as to be dangerous to mere persons—the advent of post-persons might be highly beneficial to us mere persons.

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Self-serving bias and the structure of moral status

Thomas Douglas

David DeGrazia tentatively defends what he calls the Interests Model of moral status (*see page 135*).¹ On this model all sentient beings have the same moral status, though some are owed more than others in virtue of having more or stronger interests. The proponent of this model can

accept, say, that one should normally save the life of a human in preference to that of a dog. But she denies that we should save the human because he has higher moral status. Instead, the human should be saved because he has more at stake—he may, for example, have a stronger interest in continued existence.

In defending the Interests Model, DeGrazia cuts against the grain of recent theorising on moral status, which has instead favoured what he calls the Respect

Model.^{2–4} On that model, there is a categorical difference in moral status between persons and other sentient creatures.

DeGrazia suggests that reflection on the possible moral status of genetically enhanced humans should lead us to favour the Interests Model. One advantage of the Interests Model, he claims, is that it avoids the implication that genetically enhanced humans could have higher moral status than ordinary humans. DeGrazia doubts that the Respect Model can avoid that implication. I want to suggest that, though the Interests Model may indeed be better placed than the Respect Model to avoid this implication, this does not count in favour of accepting the Interests Model.

First, the reason why we would not want enhanced beings to have higher

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moral status than us is, I suggest, that we would not want them to be owed more, morally, than us. We may be concerned, for example, that enhanced beings would be owed more favourable treatment by healthcare institutions such that we could rightly be denied the most basic treatments in order to provide sophisticated treatments for them. Or we may be concerned that enhanced beings would have stronger claims to political influence, such that they could rightly exclude us from participation in their democratic (or other political) institutions. These implications would plausibly be bad for us unenhanced humans.

Note, however, that DeGrazia's favoured Interests Model does not rule out these possibilities. There are at least two reasons why one being could be owed more than another:

1. Because its interests matter more than the other's (in which case we may say the first being has higher moral status than the second), or,
2. Because it has more or stronger interests than the other (in which case we may say that the two beings have the same moral status, though the first is owed more).

DeGrazia's Interests Model rules out the possibility that enhanced beings could be owed more than us for reason (1). But it is quite consistent with the possibility that they would be owed more than us for reason (2). Indeed, we should expect that the dramatically enhanced beings that DeGrazia describes in his *A future with post-persons* case would have many more and significantly stronger interests than us, and thus *would* be owed substantially more than us. It is not altogether clear why this situation would be any better for us than one in which enhanced beings were owed more in virtue of their higher moral status.

Perhaps it might be argued that, if enhanced beings had higher moral status than us, this would compound an already bad state of affairs for us unenhanced humans. Not only would the enhanced individuals have more and stronger inter-

ests than us, but those interests would also count more morally.

There is a further problem, however. Though we might well *want* our account of moral status to avoid implying that enhanced beings could have higher moral status than us, it is unclear why a *correct* account of moral status should avoid this implication. I suggested above that we want enhanced beings to enjoy no more moral status than us for self-interested reasons: it would be bad for us ordinary humans if enhanced beings had higher moral status. But such self-interested preferences have no evidential value on moral matters. Indeed, DeGrazia admits that, if we are concerned simply to find the correct account of moral status, we should prefer accounts of moral status that avoid "any credible charge of resting on intuitions distorted by self-serving bias". If the Interests Model is adopted partly because it avoids the implication that enhanced beings could have higher moral status than persons, it will be susceptible to a credible charge of precisely this sort.

Perhaps it might be argued that it would be bad not only for us, but also from an impartial point of view, if enhanced beings had higher moral status than ordinary human persons. It is not clear why this would be so, however.⁵ Indeed, there is a sense in which one being's having higher moral status than another cannot be impartially bad. If a human has higher moral status than a dog, this is because the human has some property—perhaps the capacity for moral agency or for self-consciousness, perhaps just her humanity—that justifies her higher moral status. If the human possesses no property that justifies her higher moral status, then she does not have higher moral status after all. Similarly, if enhanced beings had higher moral status than us, this would be because they had some property that justified their higher moral status. What, then, would be wrong with the existence of this gap in moral status between them and us?

Moreover, even if there were something impartially bad about enhanced beings

having higher moral status than us, it remains unclear why we should favour an account of moral status that would rule out this possibility. We are looking for the correct account of moral status, not the one according to which the existence of genetically enhanced beings would be least problematic, either for us, or from an impartial point of view.

I am sympathetic to DeGrazia's Interests Model of moral status. As he notes, this model has several attractive features. However, I do not think its implication that enhanced beings would share our moral status is among them. Though it might be bad for us if enhanced beings had greater moral status than us, it is not clear that it would be bad from an impartial point of view. And even if it would be impartially bad, it is not clear that this implies anything about the true structure of moral status.

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