

Unfit for the Future: The Need for Moral Enhancement

Most of their history human beings have lived in comparatively small and close-knit societies, with a primitive technology that allowed them to affect only their most immediate environment. Their moral psychology is therefore adapted to make them fit to live in these conditions; it is myopic, restricted to a concern about people in the neighbourhood and their immediate future. But by scientific technology humans have radically changed their living conditions, while their moral psychology has remained fundamentally the same through this change which is occurring with an accelerating speed. Human beings now live in societies with millions of citizens, and with an advanced scientific technology which enables them to exercise an influence that extends all over the world and far into the future. This is leading to increasing environmental degradation and to deleterious climate change. The advanced scientific technology has also equipped human beings with nuclear and biological weapons of mass destruction which might be used by states in wars over dwindling natural resources, or by terrorists. Liberal democracies cannot overcome these problems by novel technology. What is needed is an enhancement of the moral dispositions of their citizens, an extension of their moral concern beyond a small circle of personal acquaintances and further into the future. Otherwise, human civilization is jeopardized. It is doubtful whether this moral enhancement could be accomplished by means of traditional moral education. Therefore, we should explore the prospects of moral enhancement by alternative, biomedical means.