

# Biotech Enhancement and the History of Redemption

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In 2003 the President's Council on Bioethics released a report titled *Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness*. It is a very striking document—both in its own right as an exploration of its topic, and also as a government document that is highly philosophical in character and entirely without any policy recommendations. As one who participated in the discussions that led to the writing of *Beyond Therapy*, I both recognize its peculiar character and believe that it made a distinctive contribution to thought about human enhancement.

In April of 2004, Michael Sandel, who was also a Council member, published an article in the *Atlantic* titled “The Case Against Perfection.” In slightly expanded form that article became a book under the same title, published in 2007. Sandel's illustrations and examples are drawn almost entirely from the Council's meetings, although the *Atlantic* article nowhere notes that. There are a few passing references to the Council in the later book, for instance when Sandel makes clear how his own preferred analysis differs from that of *Beyond Therapy*—a difference I will in due course take up.

Each of these analyses, different though they are in important respects, offers reasons why we should be hesitant to endorse genetic and pharmacological enhancement. Neither argument necessarily calls for rejection of any and every technique of enhancement, but the concerns raised by both arguments give serious reasons for hesitation, and I will work my way through them in some detail.

What I have in mind, however, goes a little beyond what either *Beyond Therapy* or *The Case Against Perfection* does. I want to use them as a starting point for trying to think theologically about enhancement, by which I mean something that falls a little short of what is often called “transhumanism”

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or “posthumanism.” For, after all, Christian hope focuses not on the overcoming or obliteration of our humanity, but on its fulfillment.

My goal is not so much to render judgment on one or another possible technique for enhancement nor, even, to sort through the thorny problem of distinguishing therapy from enhancement, but, instead, to place the problem within a theological framework that is both useful in some ways and complicating in other ways. Useful because the reasons for hesitation offered by the Council and by Sandel give us a way to pour content into certain theological affirmations. Complicating because the complete story of God’s action in Christ to redeem the world points us toward a future that does something more than just endorse the concerns articulated by *Beyond Therapy* and *The Case Against Perfection*.

The title of this essay indicates the framework within which I am thinking. In the massive and never-completed volumes of his *Church Dogmatics* (1932–1967), the Swiss theologian Karl Barth envisions ethics as offering an account of human action that corresponds to the threefold form of God’s action in creation, reconciliation, and redemption. Because we are God’s creatures, there must be some account that accepts, honors, and celebrates distinctively human agency. Because we are sinners whom God has in Jesus acted to reconcile, our life is disordered in countless ways, not least in our search for mastery and self-sufficiency. And because we are heirs of the future God has promised, we will one day be perfected—really enhanced—in a way that does not obliterate our created humanity but, rather, expresses God’s faithfulness to it. I want to borrow not the substance but the structure of Barth’s account, using it as an approach for thinking about enhancement.

Christian moral reflection on almost any important topic—in this case, enhancement—cannot ignore any of the three angles of vision that Barth distinguishes. The three angles of vision do not simply follow one another in lockstep sequence, nor does any one ever replace another. But even if, as Barth himself noted, it is difficult to combine the three, it is still important to recall that, as he put it, in ethics our task is “to accompany this history of God and man from creation to reconciliation and redemption, indicating the mystery of the encounter at each point on the path according to its own distinctive character.”

### **Enhancement as a Means to Superior Performance**

*Beyond Therapy* discusses at length several different kinds of biotechnical enhancement—among them attempts to produce better children, ageless

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bodies, and happy souls. Each of those discussions is informative and thought-provoking, but I want to attend chiefly to the report's discussion (in chapter 3) of attempts to achieve superior performance. Perhaps this is not the most important or dangerous form of enhancement, but the discussion in this chapter has always seemed to me to be both profound and puzzling. And it invites us, I think, to theological reflection.

Most obviously in the world of competitive sports, but also in other realms of life, we look for ways to improve our performance. Some ways, such as exercise and nutrition, may seem relatively commonplace and unproblematic. Others, such as pharmacological or genetic measures to enhance our physical capacities seem more far-reaching and are more likely to make us fear that there is something problematic about trying to be what University of Minnesota bioethics professor Carl Elliott has called "better than well."

Why should or might such enhancement techniques trouble us? *Beyond Therapy* notes and discusses a few standard concerns, only in the end to suggest that they do not penetrate to the central problem. They merit brief discussion, however, in order to fill out the reasons for concern.

One issue has to do with fairness. Perhaps enhancement could give a boost to those whom nature has not blessed with many talents or gifts, and that would seem like a good thing. We might wonder, though, whether the desired result would really come to pass. If opportunities for enhancement were available to relatively few, we might exacerbate rather than even out the inequalities already present in our native endowments. If, on the other hand, enhancements were available to all, differences in natural talents would still remain and greater equality would not necessarily result. So something more than a worry about fairness is needed to account for our unease.

It could also be that an undercurrent of coercion would manifest itself. We might feel pressure—either from within ourselves or from others—to find ways to improve our capacities. Such pressure might nudge us in directions we do not really want to go or trap us on an endless treadmill of ambition. Perhaps so. Still, as *Beyond Therapy* notes, many areas of life are already marked by pressure to perform well and succeed. Nor would we want it otherwise. Thus, for example, we look for and admire excellence in musical performance, and we would like the hands of our surgeon to be steady and skillful. Moreover, the fundamental problem cannot be simply that some of us might feel pressured to use enhancement techniques. If there were nothing problematic in itself about the techniques, we would hardly be worried about pressure to use them.

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Yet another obvious concern is that in our eagerness to enhance our capacities we might turn to techniques whose safety is unproven and which turn out to be harmful. Clearly, this is a serious concern worth taking seriously, although the relentless progress of modern medicine needs to be set over against any such worry. Even apart from our confidence in medical advancement, however, *Beyond Therapy* notes a question we might ask ourselves in some instances. Why should we not run certain risks in the pursuit of excellent performance? Professional athletes, for example, often accept risk of harm as a necessary aspect of their drive to succeed. Thus, in the midst of ongoing discussions about the danger to professional football players caused by concussions, Chris Conte, at the time a safety for the Chicago Bears, was quoted in 2014 as saying: “I’d rather have the experience of playing in the NFL and die 10 to 15 years earlier than not play in the NFL and have a long life.” Why exactly should we prefer a safe, well-balanced life to one that risks much in the pursuit of superior performance? After all, as *Beyond Therapy* notes, “all human excellence, to some degree, requires at least some distortion.”

A deeper concern emerges, however, in the Council’s suggestion that the character of our agency might be undermined by techniques of enhancement. Consider the difference between improving my skill as a hitter through improved training and practice or through the use of performance-enhancing drugs. When we train, the capacities that we want to improve are improved precisely by using them. The changes (and, it is hoped, improvements) come then from “putting our bodies to work” rather than from “having our bodies ‘worked on.’” This means, *Beyond Therapy* suggests, that our character as agents might be diminished by the use of enhancement techniques. We “become ‘better’ by no longer fully being ourselves.”

Why should the use of enhancement diminish our agency in a way that increased and improved training does not? One possible reason, given some credence by the Council, is that, whereas improvement that comes through training is intelligible to the agent, improvement produced by some sort of biotechnical aid will seem from the agent’s perspective to happen almost by magic. At least in part, then, the agent is alienated from his own activity. I don’t think, however, that this can completely explain the idea of diminished agency. While there does seem to be a recognizable difference between working our body and having it worked upon, in both cases an agent might have some comprehension of the reasons for improved performance, and in neither case would an agent be likely to understand fully the connection between what is done and the

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improvement that results. So diminished agency must point to something more than just the fact that an agent might not himself understand his improved performance.

The concern of *Beyond Therapy* is not simply that our agency could be diminished but, rather, that we might undermine a specifically *human* form of agency—excellent activity in which, as much as is possible, the doer is fully and willingly invested in the deed. As *Beyond Therapy* puts it: “The runner on steroids or with genetically enhanced muscles is still, of course, a human being who runs. But the doer of the deed is, arguably, less obviously *himself* and less obviously *human* than his unaltered counterpart.”

We could, as the document notes, program a computer to play chess at a very high level. Is it “doing” the same thing as its human opponent? It may produce a well-executed game of chess, but that does not necessarily make it a great chess player. Likewise, we do not want to treat ourselves “as if we were batting machines to be perfected.” Or again, suppose we were able to produce what appeared to be moral excellences—courage, humility, concern for others—by using a pill that bypassed the agent’s need for character development or training in virtue. Might not something distinctively human thereby be lost?

The concern then is not simply agency, but distinctively *human* agency and excellence. What does *Beyond Therapy* mean by this? I think it wants to point us to something that, while simple to state, gets at the complexity of our humanity. Near the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as Aristotle considers what will fulfill a human being, he suggests that the answer lies in “whatever is his proper function” (or, more literally, “proper work”). That distinctive function must go beyond what human beings share with plant life (nourishment and growth), and also beyond what they share with the other animals (sense perception, desire for what is perceived, and movement to secure what is desired). Distinctively human action is carried out in conjunction, Aristotle says, with “the rational element” of the self. At its highest and most excellent it is not merely instinctive.

Human activity is marked by reflective purposiveness. Hence, for human beings, unlike the other animals, there is no naturally given unity of doer and deed. Marked by a kind of inwardness and self-transcendence, we are both located in our bodies and dislocated from them by reflection and choice. To overcome that dislocation without ceasing to be reflecting and choosing animals is needed if we are to achieve the kind of wholeness in which the doer is fully invested in the deed. “At such moments [of wholeness] the athlete experiences and displays something like the unity of doer and deed one observes in other animals, but for humans that

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unity is a notable *achievement* which far transcends what mere animals are capable of.” Thus, the problem with some techniques of enhancement, at least if *Beyond Therapy* is correct, is that they alienate us further from ourselves, exacerbating the self’s division rather than unifying doer and deed. To use techniques that are calculated to bypass our own will and reflection loses something of the distinctively human character of our performance. In such instances, the body is more like a horse being whipped by a rider than “a body gracefully and harmoniously at work.” Put more theologically, perhaps we could say that something of the excellence which human beings are created to achieve and enact is undermined, diminished, or lost.

To be sure, when we turn to enhancement as a means to superior performance, we do so as willful, choosing human beings. Might one not argue that this is characteristically and distinctively human activity? I’m not certain that *Beyond Therapy* directly addresses such a claim, but we can see what its answer would be. By thinking of our humanity only as willed freedom over limitations and not also as finite embodiedness, we lose—or at least diminish—something essential to our created nature.

I am a rather regular watcher of *Baseball Tonight* on ESPN. Near the end of the program there are always two segments showing brief clips from that day’s games. One segment, “Going, Going, Gone,” simply shows one home run after another—displays of power and strength. The other—and by my lights more interesting—segment is called “Web Gems.” There we see the best defensive plays of the day. Not just one feat of power after another, but graceful displays of human beings at work. After a while the home runs all look pretty much alike; each of the web gems has its own distinctive excellence. They are not just superior activity in general; they are the flourishing activity of particular persons. Something like that, if I may be allowed such a proletarian illustration, gets at a bit of what *Beyond Therapy* has in mind. Its contention is that enhancement should concern us primarily because it threatens to diminish the humanly excellent character of what we do. Although *Beyond Therapy* does not put it this way, one might say that we have not been created to be well-functioning machines or, even, animals governed largely by instinct. Human excellence calls for something more difficult to achieve. Not the loving disposition or graceful accomplishment produced by a pill or an injection, but the care for others and the excellent performance that develops over time through the training and discipline of our passions, desires, and capabilities. Perhaps, then, one reason to worry about biotechnical enhancement is that it might fail to honor and uphold the peculiar character of our created humanity.

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## Giftedness, Control, and Desire

Michael Sandel's approach, although it draws on many of the same examples and shares many of *Beyond Therapy's* concerns, identifies the deepest problem with enhancement differently. Although diminished agency is a genuine reason for concern, Sandel argues that the chief problem is almost the opposite—what he terms “hyperagency.” “The problem is not the drift to mechanism but the drive to mastery. And what the drive to mastery misses, and may even destroy, is an appreciation of the gifted character of human powers and achievements.”

As I noted earlier, *Beyond Therapy* explores enhancement in four different areas of life—examining our desire to produce better children, ageless bodies, happy souls, and superior performance. I am attending especially though not exclusively to attempts to improve our performance, whereas Sandel's primary focus is, I would say, the desire to produce better children, and that may be the area of enhancement that raises most obviously the concern about hyperagency. But he does not ignore the topic of superior performance, and there too he is concerned about the drive to mastery at least as much as the drift to mechanism.

Sandel does grant the validity of *Beyond Therapy's* standpoint. How do we know when we are simply cultivating our legitimate gifts (as all of us may), or when, on the other hand, we are corrupting them by the use of enhancement techniques? His answer, repeated several times, is that it depends on whether these techniques “perfect or obscure the skills essential to the game.” We want to perform and compete in such a way that we are participating in a “sport,” not a “spectacle.” This goes some way toward sharing the concerns of *Beyond Therapy*. For we can distinguish in this way between sport and spectacle only if we have some sense of what it means for us to be fully involved agents participating in the action. Thus, Sandel's focus on the dangers of a drive for mastery need not mean that we lose *Beyond Therapy's* worries about how enhancement might diminish the character of our created humanity. It complements rather than replaces *Beyond Therapy's* approach.

At the same time, we should not for a moment lose the additional insight Sandel's perspective adds. The drive for mastery that is present in many of our attempts at enhancement displays and encourages a disposition that is, he believes, morally problematic. It expresses a willfulness and an “impulse to rail against the given” that is “the deepest source of the moral trouble with enhancement.” We seek, even if not always self-consciously, to master our world and be self-sufficient. Sandel's characteristic way of

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making this point is to say that we lose, or at least endanger, a sense of the “giftedness” of life. We begin to imagine that our talents and powers are the result of our own doing, and we encourage ourselves to think of the world as available for shaping in accord with our ever more expansive desires and dreams.

For many readers it is probably hard not to hear this as a claim grounded in religious belief. A failure to see the giftedness of life is surely part of what Christians and Jews have meant by sin. Sandel acknowledges that his language of giftedness might easily be taken to express a religious sensibility, which he does not reject. But he also suggests that there may be other, non-religious grounds for declining to think of the world as indefinitely malleable to our desires. Gratitude for our accomplishments can perhaps get along without metaphysical underpinnings any more developed than a kind of natural piety for what is given. “We commonly speak of an athlete’s gift, or a musician’s, without making any assumption about whether or not the gift comes from God. What we mean is simply that the talent in question is not wholly the athlete’s or the musician’s own doing; whether he has nature, fortune, or God to thank for it, the talent is an endowment that exceeds his control.” Even if this is true, a point about which I am uncertain, we can see why religious thinkers might appropriate Sandel’s approach as a way of expressing some of their own beliefs.

The drive for mastery embedded in enhancement carries with it several moral costs, which Sandel nicely develops. Those who do not think of themselves as gifted may lack the kind of humility needed to restrain their aims and projects. Lacking the humility that can relinquish control, we prefer “a world inhospitable to the unbidden, a gated community writ large.” Moreover, thinking of ourselves as self-made and self-sufficient, we can easily lose a sense of solidarity with those who are less fortunate and less gifted than we. “A lively sense of the contingency of our gifts” provides the link that connects humility with solidarity.

Perhaps more important still is the way in which the drive for mastery may expand our sense of human responsibility to a point that loses the true meaning of our humanity. We see here why Sandel tends to think that the deepest problem raised by enhancement is not diminished agency but hyperagency—“the explosion, not the erosion, of responsibility.” Making so much of life an arena governed by choice and will creates a burden of responsibility perhaps greater than human beings are meant to bear. The control we hope to exercise may actually reflect the deeply disordered character of human life, a disorder that in Christian terms is unsurprising. Our lives are, after all, deeply distorted by sin.

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We should remember, of course, that, just as picturing Satan with horns and pitchfork may blind us to him when he actually appears, so also warnings about hyperagency might encourage us to think only in terms of large-scale political programs or social movements. In fact, however, being blind to the giftedness of life may also readily undermine many of our everyday activities—being a parent or a spouse, accepting the inevitable decline of old age in ourselves or those we love, recognizing the limits even of our accomplishments, keeping in mind, as Chesterton put it, that “it is not familiarity but comparison that breeds contempt.” The thirst that drives large-scale enhancement projects can also corrupt many of the most important aspects of ordinary life.

Near the very end of his discussion Sandel offers a fascinating (to me) suggestion about what it was that gave rise to our age of genetic enhancement. We have tended to think that it grew unplanned from the great strides made in modern medicine. First we learned to cure disease in new ways, and then we realized that similar techniques might be used in ways that go “beyond therapy” for the perfecting of human nature. “But,” Sandel suggests, “that may have the story backward.” It could be that present at the creation of the genetic age was disordered desire. The age of genetic enhancement may be “the ultimate expression of our resolve to see ourselves astride the world.” In short, a vision of a promised future, a future that would be the result of our own achievement and mastery, may lie at the root of this biotechnical movement.

We have, then, two reasons—complementary and not competing—for drawing back somewhat from the lure of enhancement. One approach explores the character of distinctively human activity, inviting us to affirm our created nature—to see even in its limits and vulnerability what is distinctively human. A second approach explores the human tendency to overreach, a tendency that surely contributes to much of the brokenness of our world. Thus, *Beyond Therapy* might be said to encourage us to understand and uphold our created nature in its integrity. *The Case Against Perfection* might be read as depicting a world so broken by our desire for self-sufficiency that only God’s reconciling action can begin to restore it.

Interestingly, however, neither of these concerns points us toward the future. Yet, if Sandel’s closing suggestion is correct, at the root of the enhancement project may be a thirst to control and shape human destiny. This reminds us that the form of God’s action in the history of redemption is threefold. We need, then, to consider what the future that God promises may add to our consideration of enhancement, and, to be sure, how it may complicate our reflections.

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## New Futures: Body, Perfection, and Contentment

When we turn now to think about that desired (and promised) future, neither *Beyond Therapy* nor *The Case Against Perfection* will be a sufficient guide. We are pretty much on our own. The Israelite prophet envisions a day when those

who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
they shall run and not be weary,  
they shall walk and not faint.

If we are to hold together the three moments in the history of redemption, we need to try to think of that promised future not as post-humanity but as perfected humanity. The history of redemption discloses to us, as Barth put it, a “new depth” in creation that opens to us “both the distinction and the connexion between the reconciliation which is to be received here and now in faith and the redemption which is to be revealed one day beyond, and therefore [both the distinction and the connection] between the provisional and final form of creation.” God responds to our refusal to see ourselves as gifted not simply by restoring the integrity of a corrupted creation but “with the revelation of a perfection concealed even in the original creation in its integrity. He does not only make the sick whole, but gives him a share in the hope of everlasting life.” This, surely, is to be better than well.

But it is also to introduce a complicating factor into our attempt to evaluate the enhancement project. Barth says that God restores the integrity of a corrupted creation. Barth also says that this restoration is not a return to what was the “provisional” form of creation; rather, it reveals the “final” form of creation, a perfection that was “concealed even in the original creation in its integrity.” Or, putting it in the language of agency that *Beyond Therapy* uses, we might say, as Christian ethicist Oliver O’Donovan does in *Self, World, and Time* (2013), that “the restored agent is also the renewed agent.” When, he writes, that promised future breaks into our world at Easter, we are, on the one hand, helped to honor “the beauty and order of the life that was the creator’s gift to his creation and is restored there.” But, on the other hand, we are also turned “from the empty tomb to a new moment of participation in God’s work and being.”

This new moment comes to us not simply as a development of the past but as the advent of God’s promised future. Theologians have sometimes distinguished between two different ways of talking about the future. We

may speak of it as *futurum*, a development that draws out potential already present. Or we may speak of it as *adventus*, which comes to us not out of the past but as something new. German theologian Jürgen Moltmann, in *The Coming of God* (1995) makes the point nicely with reference to Revelation 1:4. It reads: “Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come.” We might expect, Moltmann observes, a slightly different formula: “...and from him who *will be*.” But the verse speaks not of the one who will be as he has been in the past but of the one who is to come. “God’s future is not that he will be as he was and is, but that he is on the move and coming towards the world.”

We have to ask ourselves, then, what might this divine *adventus* mean for the way we think about enhancement? Will it permit us to rest content simply with delineating the nature of created human agency or underscoring the hubris that distorts human life and must be overcome by God’s reconciling work? Once we acknowledge that what God promises is a new creation, we may be unsure how to proceed. We can perhaps—even if just barely—imagine what human agency restored to its created character would be like. But can we pour any content into the promise of an entirely renewed humanity?

At the very least this suggests that even if we see enormous dangers in the push for enhancement, even if, together with Sandel, we detect in it “the ultimate expression of our resolve to see ourselves astride the world,” we cannot respond simply by falling back into our finitude. Theologian and ethicist Robert Song is right to argue that we should not “warmly embrace human limitations without a murmur of protest.” In part we should not because the desire to transcend some givens of our finite condition is itself a legitimate aspect of our created nature. Just as important, however, is the fact that God does not simply repeat himself. Something new breaks into our world at Easter. It directs us back to a world restored. It also directs us forward, toward a world renewed. “This perishable nature must put on the imperishable,” as St. Paul writes. How shall we think about that renewed humanity, and what, if anything, can it teach us about enhancement?

I have already said that we are pretty much on our own when we try to think about the future God has promised. Pretty much, but not entirely. In the words of Anglican theologian Eric Mascall, “We can dimly see what it will involve if we look at the human being in whom it has already happened”—that is, the resurrected Jesus. Doing so offers a hint of how we might think about the perfected humanity at least of those who share in his life. The transcendence of which Jesus’ resurrection is the first fruit

is set, Robert Song suggests, “in a new key: not as escape from embodiment, but as the hope of a transformed body,” involving in some way or other not just our disembodied spirit but the whole of our being. Can we say anything about that transformed, enhanced existence—and, even more important, does what we say have any implications for our attitude toward enhancement here and now?

To say too much here would be to lose the tentativeness that seems appropriate; yet, to understand appropriate tentativeness to mean, essentially, silence, would be to cut these reflections a bit short. But, although enhancement there will surely be in the promised future, I am going to interpret this last chapter in the history of redemption chiefly as an invitation to caution about enhancement projects here and now—and that for roughly three sorts of reasons. I state them here briefly and will then try to develop them at least a little. First, there are aspects of bodily life that cut so deeply into our personal identity that perhaps we should not seek to alter them, much less enhance them. Second, the perfected humanity of God’s promised future cannot be our own achievement and, hence, should perhaps not be the product of our manipulation. And third, the end state toward which we move in the history of redemption is one of contentment; perhaps we should begin to practice it here and now.

When Christians have thought about the future God promises, they have often focused on what it will mean spiritually. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they have supposed that in that promised future, sharing in the beatific vision, our knowing will be elevated. Not necessarily in the sense that we would then know whatever there is to be known, but in the sense that we would attain a “connatural” knowledge of God—the kind of knowing that comes from sharing God’s life rather than simply looking at it from the outside. We should not, though, picture this in too monochromatic a fashion. In C. S. Lewis’s *The Great Divorce* (1945), the narrator receives instruction in the nature of the redeemed life. In one instance, he learns that each of the saints will see some things better than others, and, when they do, they will want to share what they see. In that way the vision of all will be enhanced.

Christians have also supposed that in that resurrected life peace and joy will be undisturbed—without, evidently, the aid of Prozac. “In that soul where divine love reigns, and is in lively exercise,” Jonathan Edwards says, “nothing can raise a storm.” Closely related to these enhancements would be the kind of moral perfection Edwards imagines must be present in the “world of love” that is heaven. Morally, those who share in the resurrected life of Christ are, clearly, better than well. “With respect to

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the degree of their love, it is perfect.... Their love shall be without any remains of a contrary principle." Thinking perhaps of the passage from Isaiah that I cited earlier, Edwards adds: "The soul which is winged with love shall have no weight tied to the feet to hinder its flight."

However delightful and desirable such enhancements of mind and character would be, they retain a kind of "spiritual" quality that says relatively little about the promised future of created *bodies*. Taken alone, such promised enhancements might even seduce us into supposing that the body is not involved in the perfection God promises. But to think that would be to lose what was my starting point—namely, the stories of the resurrected Jesus. Were it not for the testimony of those who saw him we would have little reason to suppose that the redemption God promises extends to our bodies.

But clearly, those witnesses did not think of the resurrection as purely spiritual. What they describe is, as Lewis wrote in *Miracles* (1947), "a wholly new mode of being," which is both continuous and discontinuous with bodily life as we know it. Jesus' resurrected body can continue to be present in the natural world we inhabit, related to us in both space and time; yet, it rides nature and is not ridden by it. This is not simply a restoration of creation. A genuinely new work of God, it nevertheless reveals—in words I quoted earlier from Barth—"a perfection concealed even in the original creation in its integrity." It is a little more like the gutting and rebuilding of a house than the building of an entirely new one. Quite obviously, our attempts to describe this are likely to be halting and inadequate. As Lewis put it in an oft-quoted passage, "I think our present outlook might be like that of a small boy who, on being told that the sexual act was the highest bodily pleasure should immediately ask whether you ate chocolates at the same time.... The boy knows chocolate: he does not know the positive thing that excludes it." When it comes to imagining the perfect bodies of God's new creation, we are all like the small boy.

No doubt we are naturally inclined to imagine that any bodily defects present in this life will no longer be present in the risen and redeemed bodies of the new creation. In heaven, Edwards says, "there shall be none appearing with any defects, either natural or moral." With some hesitation, however, I am inclined to wonder if both natural and moral defects will be equally absent. With respect to our moral (and spiritual) perfection, it is difficult to imagine those who are in any way still hostile to God, those who are unwilling to bend the knee in adoration of God, or those whose loves remain disordered being able to love God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind. So, then, no moral defects in our perfected humanity.

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But, while granting that these questions admit of no certain answer, I tend to think we should not necessarily say the same with respect to all defects of nature. After all, the marks of nails and spear remain in the body of the resurrected Christ, but these bodily “defects”—if that is the right word—have been taken into a life of glory. They mark the continuity that exists between the Jesus who lived and died, and the Jesus who now lives as the Lamb that was slain. They are central to his identity, which is why Thomas was invited to see and touch them.

I am wading into deep and troubling waters here, but I suspect that some bodily defects may touch us so deeply as to shape who we are. If the stump that should have been my leg has shaped the person I am throughout my life, are we certain that even in the new creation I should have two legs? If my child has from birth had Down syndrome, if it is *that* child whom I have loved, and if she has in return loved me in her characteristic way, are we certain that even in the new creation she should be free of the limitations that come along with Down’s? I am, of course, in danger of becoming like the small boy who knows only the pleasure of chocolates, but perhaps we have to run that risk.

I said earlier that I would try to avoid the thorny problem of distinguishing therapy from enhancement, and I have now brought upon myself the complications it involves. After all, I would not say that here and now we should simply forgo therapeutic attempts to cure or ameliorate defects of the body. If we could cure Down’s prenatally, no doubt we should. But there are many imponderables here. If my daughter lives for thirty years with Down syndrome, if that is who she is in relation to me and all others, is there some point at which, even in this life, we should not try to “cure” her condition? How long must she live as an individual with Down’s before our attempting to “cure” her would be more like obliterating her? If such questions make any sense, then I am not certain why her redeemed body should be not only cured but also enhanced. There is, at least, reason here for caution, reason grounded in aspects of our bodily life that cut very deeply into our identity.

There are also other reasons. Recall how *Beyond Therapy*, attempting to characterize humanly excellent action, described it in terms of a unity of doer with deed, a unity and wholeness not naturally given to us, since we are divided within ourselves. For *Beyond Therapy* humanly excellent action is, therefore, a notable achievement of which the other animals are not capable. We might wonder, though, whether the discord we often experience in action can really be overcome entirely by anything properly characterized as our achievement. Robert Song seems right to say of the

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resurrected (perfected and enhanced) body that, whatever it is, “it cannot be the end product of human manipulation.” Whatever enhanced capacities the new creation might offer, they cannot be entirely our own achievement. And since they are not, we can hardly be too confident about our efforts to imagine or produce them.

It follows that where our understanding is so limited so also should be our efforts to manipulate. Wisely, therefore, Lewis observed: “Mystics have got as far in contemplation of God as the point at which the senses are banished: the further point, at which they will be put back again, has (to the best of my knowledge) been reached by no one.” This is as it should be. The perfection of our bodies belongs to a *history* of redemption, a history not yet concluded, a history that we do not control. And if it is such a history, perhaps “perfection” is not quite the right way—a bit too static, a bit lacking in diversity—to describe the goal at which this history aims. Perhaps the language of glory, which is biblical language, should be preferred. The history of redemption is, St. Paul says, already at work in our world as we, “beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another.” Which brings me to yet a third reason for caution.

Edwards was confident that there would still be degrees of glory in heaven. What there will not be, however, is envy on the part of those who are lesser in glory. In this he was simply reworking an idea Augustine expresses in his *City of God*:

But what will be the grades of honour and glory here [i.e., in heaven], appropriate to degrees of merit? Who is capable of imagining them, not to speak of describing them? But there will be such distinctions; of that there can be no doubt. And here also that blessed City will find in itself a great blessing, in that no inferior will feel envy of his superior.... And so although one will have a gift inferior to another, he will have also the compensatory gift of contentment with what he has.

And if content, evidently not thirsting to be enhanced. Here, at least, that thirst for mastery and its accompanying ingratitude for the gifts given us, a thirst that Sandel thought he discerned as a motivating force in our culture’s desire for enhancement, will have been uprooted and overcome. Perhaps we should say that when we have received the promised gift of perfected humanity, we will no longer desire it as our own achievement.

This gives us a clue about how to think of enhancement here and now. We need not reject out of hand every attempt at enhancement, though we should retain a healthy skepticism about our ability to distinguish

genuine enhancement from the simulacra our disordered desires are likely to imagine. Perhaps there can be moments when aiming at enhancement is an appropriate exercise of our created freedom or even an anticipation of a renewed world. But it should hardly be our central concern. For we are on our way to a state of contentment. Along the way in this history of redemption, we should seek to free ourselves from the thirst that undermines that genuine human agency described in *Beyond Therapy*, a thirst that also blinds us, as Sandel emphasizes, to the giftedness that marks our lives. Surely though, if not here and now, then one day there will be a place for enhancement in this history, because in some way or other it must be part of the future God has promised. In what way or other? Well, perhaps it does no harm if we now and again allow our imaginations to roam a bit, considering possible future enhancements—as did Augustine, Edwards, and Lewis, and as I myself have done—but in order then, in Lewis’s words, “to make room for a more complete and circumspect agnosticism.”