



## AJOB Neuroscience

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/uabn20>

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Published online: 26 Feb 2015.



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To cite this article: Joel Anderson & Bart A. Kamphorst (2015) Should Uplifting Music and Smart Phone Apps Count as Willpower Doping? The Extended Will and the Ethics of Enhanced Motivation, AJOB Neuroscience, 6:1, 35-37, DOI: [10.1080/21507740.2014.995321](https://doi.org/10.1080/21507740.2014.995321)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21507740.2014.995321>

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# Should Uplifting Music and Smart Phone Apps Count as Willpower Doping? The Extended Will and the Ethics of Enhanced Motivation

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Our motivation isn’t always what we would like it to be. Owing to fatigue, laziness, boredom, or anxiety, our inclinations are sometimes out of alignment with our core goals and values. In such cases, realizing authentically held goals requires overcoming our inclinations, pulling ourselves together, and getting things done. If the motivation isn’t there, we need to get ourselves motivated, and this may require that we undertake indirect and even somewhat manipulative measures with ourselves. This wouldn’t be necessary, of course, if we could always increase our motivation simply by reviewing the reasons for doing something we don’t feel like doing. Realistically, however, virtually all of us regularly need to find other, non-reason-based means of increasing our motivation or making tedious tasks bearable. We play uplifting music to improve our mood; we set up little “treats” for ourselves to incentivize completing a boring task; and we cue up a series of tasks so that all we have to do is “crank the widgets.”

Ordinarily, none of this is considered problematic until people start boosting their motivation with medications, at which point alarm bells go off over the prospect of willpower doping. In “Enhancing Motivation by Use of Prescription Stimulants: The Ethics of Motivation Enhancement,” Torben Kjærsgaard (2015) usefully highlights the distinctive concerns related to motivation-related forms of enhancement, which have been largely neglected in debates over enhancement. What is particularly interesting about Kjærsgaard’s discussion is that he brackets (without discounting) the most frequently raised objections to enhancement—having to do with pragmatic issues of safety and effectiveness and with interpersonal issues of fairness and coercion—so as to focus on ethical concerns with the ways in which voluntary pharmacological

motivation enhancement jeopardizes the sense in which one leads a good life. He sums up his central claim as follows:

It is particularly problematic, from an ethical point of view, if an individual relies on motivation enhancement for prolonged periods of time, and/or if motivation enhancers are used to treat symptoms of alienation—problems concerning the larger structures of meaning in one’s life. Finally, I hold that it may lead us down a slippery slope if we come to see laziness and lack of willpower as something that should be medicated away. (9)

There is much about this with which we agree, particularly in the clear-cut cases when motivation enhancement demonstrably exacerbates underlying alienation or laziness by blocking possibilities to address the root problems. In many cases, however, matters are more complicated, for much of life requires that we rely more heavily and more frequently on motivational enhancement than Kjærsgaard’s analysis suggests. At the same time, legitimate concerns arise about what we are doing to ourselves, ethically speaking, long before we get to the extremes in terms of which Kjærsgaard formulates his concerns. This is especially common in cases in which the best we can hope for is an “instrumental engagement” with an activity, where we value an activity for its contribution to some further purpose, but not intrinsically. To appropriately evaluate the cases in this gray area, we need a more nuanced analysis.

Take the case of Alice, who can get herself to exercise only if she has electronic dance music blasting; she may care about her fitness, but she hates the workouts unless she has the music. Is she merely papering over her alienation from the exercises, or just being smart about

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handling low motivation in a way that allows her to achieve her wholehearted desire to be healthy? Or take the case of Bernard, who is committed to his teaching—including providing fair evaluations—but who finds grading exams so tedious that he procrastinates endlessly unless he uses a smartphone app that assists him in setting milestones, tracking his speed, and giving rewards as he works his way through his stack of exams. The gamification adds a level of interest and thereby motivation, but does Bernard's continuing antipathy towards grading make him less of an authentically good teacher?

The important thing to note about these mundane, familiar cases of motivation enhancement is that getting away from the stigmatized context of off-label use of prescription medicines allows us to see how motivational enhancement may well be ethically appropriate. After all, if the cases of Alice and Bernard are acceptable, we need a much stronger argument for why the use of medications to accomplish the same tasks is necessarily more ethically problematic (again, leaving aside issues of safety). This is an application of the "parity principle" developed in discussions of the extended mind (Clark and Chalmers 1998; Levy 2007) and extended will (Anderson 2008; Heath and Anderson 2010): If it is unproblematic in the cases of workout music and gamifying smartphone apps to cause higher levels of motivation in ourselves by nondiscursive means, then it should be unproblematic to do the same with pharmacological techniques.

As we noted, however, these cases (or variations on them) can be troubling, while still falling short of being categorically impermissible. And it is here that more work needs to be done in further clarifying the precise criteria for when motivation enhancement *becomes* problematic.

Kjærsgaard himself points to a number of criteria that can serve as a starting point for further reflection, including the criteria for when motivation enhancement leads to the suppression of genuine warning signs that something is wrong in one's life; when it leads to the loss of certain abilities; or when it induces (self-) exploitation. Regarding each of these criteria, the concerns are more a matter of degree than positions at the bottom of a "slippery slope," as Kjærsgaard suggests.

First, Kjærsgaard (2015) argues that, in bypassing one's rational capacities, motivational enhancement "might be problematic if you are not paying attention to the circumstances causing the problems" (8). The suggestion seems to be that taking stimulants might block one's insight into what one really cares about. If so, this would be problematic, but achieving this effect would probably require an Adderall drip. For it is also possible that people will continue to recognize and reflect on the incongruity related to (Elliott's notion of) alienation (Elliott 2000), precisely because they catch themselves reaching for motivation enhancements. And we need to know whether this is true, before we can judge these cases ethically.

Second, Kjærsgaard expresses a worry about "losing our capacity to pull ourselves together" (9). Again, motivation enhancements are problematic if they have this effect.

Yet the more interesting (and more pervasive) cases will be those where it's not a matter of losing a capacity entirely, but rather a matter of de-skilling to some degree or of being overly deferential, say, to motivation-enhancing apps (Anderson and Kamphorst 2014). And once we phrase it like that, we can see how difficult it becomes to identify the threshold where de-skilling and deference become genuine issues, especially given gains in the functional performance of the whole system (person plus pills, or person plus app).

Third, it is possible to interpret Kjærsgaard's worry as the idea that in adopting motivation enhancements we lose any capacity for resisting exploitation, once the enhancements ensure that we are able to handle the crazy workload imposed on us. Again, however, there is a need for nuance here and an acknowledgment that many of these cases are deeply ambivalent (Parens 2014). As Michel Foucault and colleagues (1988) have subtly shown, "technologies of the self" transform our subjectivities in ways that involve neither complete subjugation nor simple empowerment but rather a complex and ambivalent process of "*assujettissement*," in which we are sometimes active, sometimes unwitting participants. Understanding these complexities is crucial for grappling with many cases of motivation enhancement.

From the outset, we have emphasized the parallels that exist between pharmacological and nonpharmacological methods of motivation enhancement. Let us now conclude with our reasons for doing so. We believe that the best way of making progress with developing an ethics of motivational enhancement, and especially with the gray-area cases, is by focusing on nonpharmacological cases of motivation enhancement first. Shifting attention to extended will cases will give us a better methodology for clarifying the criteria that we use to distinguish problematic from unproblematic cases. First, nonpharmacological cases are more familiar, and this provides a larger and more diverse pool of cases on which to draw. In addition, we are likely to have more stable intuitions about the effects of certain motivational enhancers because of more widespread experience with them than with off-label use of prescription drugs. Second, nonpharmacological cases are less stigmatized. Focusing first on those methods gives us a less normatively loaded basis on which to analyze these complex issues, without being distracted by negative stereotypes associated with "doping" and "popping pills."

Now that Kjærsgaard has put motivational enhancement on the agenda and has identified some of the more extreme possible effects, hard work lies ahead, particularly in the gray areas. It is here that we believe that thinking about nonpharmacological cases will ultimately benefit the ethical analyses of using stimulants to improve motivation.

## FUNDING

Work on this commentary was partly supported by grant 12013 from the Technology Foundation STW's "Healthy Lifestyle Solutions" Partnership program, which is jointly

funded by the Netherlands Initiative on Brain and Cognition (NWO) and Philips Research. Opinions expressed here should not be understood as expressing the views of any of these organizations.

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# Motivation-Enhancements and Domain-Specific Values

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Recent research suggests that “smart drugs” don’t make healthy individuals who use them smarter (Vrecko 2013). The main effects are instead on levels of motivation and interest. This also seems to be what motivates those who use drugs such as Adderall to take them. For example, one of the DeSantis, Noar, and Webb (2010) interviewees, a student called Robert, had the following to say about the motivation- and interest-modulating effect of the drug: “I have to be honest; it is one of the reasons that I really love this stuff (Adderall). No matter what it is, it is just more interesting. Like biology last semester, I remember really being into it” (163) Another informer said the following about the effects of the drug: “You’re interested in what you’re doing even if it’s boring” (Vrecko 2013, 8). If this is what currently available “cognitive enhancements” chiefly do, they are better regarded as motivation or interest enhancements. And as Torben Kjaersgaard (2015) argues in his article, the main ethical question we should be asking about such drugs is not whether there is something problematic about certain people’s making themselves smarter using these drugs. It is instead whether there is anything ethically problematic about people’s using these enhancements to control and manipulate their levels of motivation and interest.

One way we can approach this question is to ask whether on a perfectly general level there is anything wrong or regrettable about using motivation enhancements. As I read him, this is the approach that Kjaersgaard takes. Kjaersgaard proposes two general reasons for being wary of the use of motivation enhancements. The first one has to do with how motivation or interest enhancements can seemingly be used to overcome “alienation” or a sense of meaninglessness. Kjaersgaard thinks that if we have trouble finding meaning in our pursuits, and we instead feel alienated from what we are doing, it is best to not just treat the symptoms of this alienation. It is much preferable to instead dig deeper and find out what the real problem is, and perhaps choose some other path than the one we are currently on. Medicating away alienation is not the way to go. The second general ethical point Kjaersgaard makes in his article is that medicating away feelings of boredom might be a way of objectionably devaluing human effort. It might lead us to stop regarding laziness as a vice, instead coming to think of laziness as something to be gotten rid of simply by popping a pill, not by pulling ourselves together and making a greater effort. Sustained use of motivation

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