1. Introduction

This handout is based on pp.54-63 in chapter 2 ("Enhancement and Human Development") of Allen Buchanan's 2011 book *Beyond Humanity? The Ethics of Biomedical Enhancement.*

2. The Conservative Argument

The bio-conservative might

> (i) *agree* that our current stage of enhancement is the result of a long history of technological advancement and this is continuous with emerging bio-medical enhancement technologies, i.e. accept that biomedical enhancement technologies are no different from other technologies
> (ii) *agree* that these ETs have the potential to increase productivity, have network effects, and the potential to increase well-being
> (iii) but nevertheless *reject* the claim that we should use or development ETs.

One way is to argue as follows:

ARGUMENT FROM CONSERVATIVISM

P1	Enhancement technologies have tremendous *attractiveness* since they offer the potential to increase productivity, and thereby allow us to increase well-being
P2	Enhancement technologies, however, also involve tremendous *risks*.
P3	At this stage in our evolution, we are pretty well-off and so encouraging the use and development of enhancement technologies would jeopardize our gains.
C	Therefore, the pursuit of enhancement should be avoided.

O1: The conclusion is vague. If the argument is supposed to tell us which ETs we should adopt and which we should prohibit, then this argument does not provide that guidance.
O2: Without further specification, there isn't any evidence to support the view that biomedical-ETs are riskier than non-biomedical-ETs. Some non-biomedical-ETs are much more dangerous.
E1: Nuclear weapons
E2: Increased mobility.
O3*: Notice that P3 says that the *future* risks (P2) outweigh the *acknowledged* benefits (P1) of ETs.
Buchanan's key objection to this argument is this:

> "it is a fundamental mistake to assume that enhancements are valuable only for the purposes of achieving **improvements** in well-being. In some cases, improvements of particular normal human capacities may be needed to prevent things from getting worse, perhaps much worse" (*Beyond Humanity?* p.57, my emphasis)

In other words, the conservative argument assumes that the only goal of ETs is to *improve our current situation, i.e. to take us beyond normal to a super-human state*. But, Buchanan argues that this assumes that **we don't (or won't) *need* bio-ETs in the future to do any of the following**:

> (i) retain the successes reaped from evolution
> (ii) address future environmental issues, e.g. global warming, or
> (iii) to distribute historical enhancements more broadly.

On p.56, Buchanan offers six examples of bio-ETs that might be needed in order to retain existing enhancements or for distributing enhancements more broadly.

	BIO-ET	WHAT IT WILL DO
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		

CDQ: Quickly look over Buchanan's list of proposed enhancements, write them in the table above along with what function or goal they serve.

3. The Balancing Approach versus the Conclusive Reasons View

Let's assume that Buchanan is right about two things:

> (1) The two false framing assumptions are false
> (2) some enhancement will increase productivity and this has the potential of increasing well-being for everyone.

If you accept (1) and (2), then

> (3) there is good reason to **consider** the use and development of ETs

Given (3), the next step is *how to consider the use and development of ETs*. Buchanan suggests that the way we should approach ETs is through the "Balancing Approach":

> **The Balancing Approach to the Ethics of Enhancement:** in order to determine the permissibility of ETs (whether it is morally acceptable to develop / use a particular ET), we ought to *balance* the pros/cons or risks/benefits. We do this by considering various ETs in the light of what we value, in light of human well-being, in light of the harms and risks we

> run in using these technologies, and then "try to make an impartial, factually-informed, all-things-considered judgment about what to do, or at least to try to identify a range of morally acceptable options (*Beyond Humanity*, p.59)

N1: On the balancing approach, there is room to say that **some** ETs are **not** morally acceptable either because they because (i) they would decrease (rather than increase) the overall well-being of individuals or (ii) there would undermine the value of human dignity or take away inalienable rights.
E1: Integrating nuclear weaponry into the human body would likely increase the overall amount of harm in the world
E2: Some mandated enhancements might violate human freedom or conflict with religious views.

But there is an objection to approaching the ethics of enhancement in this way.

> **O1 (The Conclusive Reasons View):** There are some conclusive moral reasons against bio-ETs. These reasons are so strong that it is pointless to use the balancing approach.[1]
> **E1:** Let's consider the pros/cons of harvesting the organs of healthy living children. You see, there is a lot to be gained by taking organs from children. Many important people need these organs and those people do a lot of good for the world. Yes, the child will be in a lot of pain, but *weighed* against the good these people do, we ought to at least consider adopting this policy. *NO! There are conclusive moral reasons against this.* It does not matter how many benefits their might be to harvesting the organs of children, children have a right to bodily integrity and it does not matter what the pros/cons are.
> **E2:** Let's consider the pros/cons of forcing all students to be farmers. *No*, *there are conclusive moral reasons against this*, namely that forcing people into any profession would rob them of their individual liberty (something that it is never acceptable to do).

The Conclusive Reasons view says that if we think about biomedical enhancement technologies in a general way, we can identify some *reason* that eliminates the need to weigh the pros against the cons.

[1] For example, Habermas writes "Violations of human *rights* must not be reduced to the scale of offences against *values*. The difference between rights, which are exempt from weighing, and goods, which can be weighed and ranked accordingly as primary or secondary, should not be blurred" (*The Future of Humanity*, p.36-37).