ECOLOGICALLY RELATIONAL MORAL AGENCY

CONCEPTUAL SHIFTS IN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND THEIR PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS

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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This study examines philosophically the idea of relationality as a feature of moral agency and analyses the implications of adopting such an idea in ethical theories as frameworks for environmental ethics. The purpose is to fill the gap in academic philosophical discussion concerning the relationality of the operations of moral agency. In environmental philosophy, relationality is a quite widely defended idea with regard to the concepts of nature and human nature. However, as far as I know, relationality as constitutive for moral operations has not been previously scrutinised to any large extent.

The main task consists of two parts. The first is to construct the idea of moral agency as ecologically relational on the basis of the parallel with the lines of thought taken in two critical stances in environmental ethics towards the mainstream modern conception of moral agency, namely evolutionary naturalism and ecofeminist constructivism. The second is to analyse the philosophical implications of this relational shift in moral naturalism and moral constructivism. Together they clarify the implications of relational moral agency for environmental ethics. The study starts by analysing the concepts of moral agency in the three distinguished strategies of environmental ethics: the modernist one, which is used as the reference line, evolutionary naturalism and ecofeminist constructivism. Both of the latter take a critical stance towards the first, but from philosophically opposing directions. This study shows that these two criticisms parallel each other and are directed towards a converging idea of ecologically relational agency. The concept of relational agency is sketched through interdisciplinary support from the natural sciences, psychological and philosophical anthropology, epistemology, and philosophy of mind and action. It is argued that a currently plausible notion of moral agency challenges the view widely presupposed by modern moral philosophy. According to the analysed sources, human mental processes, knowledge and value formation included, are extended to their environments, relationships providing knowledge, experience or even intention are mutually interactive, and even intentional activity can be a non-individual issue. Research on these features refer to environmental relationality of mental operations.

Relational agency fulfils the environmentalist’s quest for a plausible notion of agency. However, to consider moral identity, as well as knowing, reasoning and acting as ecologically relational challenges common conceptions of moral autonomy and rationality. Question is raised whether this compromises the autonomy and authority of ethics. The philosophical implications of ecologically relational notion of agency are analysed in contexts of Humean naturalism, neo-Aristotelian naturalism (especially Martha Nussbaum) and neo-Kantian constructivism (especially Christine Korsgaard). Korsgaard’s theory is proposed to offer a mediating tool to reconcile relational explanation with normative authority. It is argued that the relational approach to ethics can survive the quests for moral realism, although it challenges the usual restrictions of metaethical categories and points towards a modest, relationally realist ethics.
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This dissertation results from a journey that contains different kinds of legs. Each leg of the journey has come to imprint new perspectives on the development of this study and myself as an academic scholar, though not everyone of them enhanced the product. At different legs of the journey I owe to several different individuals who have shared their company and offered inspiring discussions or support.

The first leg of this journey offered me a chance to create a comprehensive picture of the strategies of environmental ethics and to get involved in the international scientific community as well as in the theological and interdisciplinary academic teaching. I am grateful that I had a possibility to work altogether four and half years full-time on my research around the millennium. I owe this opportunity to the Finnish Cultural Foundation, to the Church Research Institute of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, and to the National Doctoral Program in Theology. I am grateful to my supervisor at this stage Professor Jaana Hallamaa for her bold trust on my work and vision, and for her empowering encouragement. I wish to acknowledge Professor Reijo Työrinoja for the initial call to join to the staff of the Department of Systematic Theology and to start with the doctoral dissertation, and the entire staff of the Department for being an inspiring work community full of excellent colleagues and dear friends. I want to thank my assisting supervisor Senior Lecturer Dr. Timo Koistinen for the supportive discussions and Professor Tage Kurten for his comments especially on the Wittgensteinian tradition in the field and for encouraging discussions. In the end of the first leg a dissertation was nearly completed, but as environmental ethics had started to rapidly develop as a field, and moreover, as new empiric signs concerning human mind and agency had emerged, I was not any more satisfied with the results based on the previous sources.

The second leg of my journey consists of full-time academic teaching as a Lecturer in Theological Ethics and Social Ethics in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki, including also interdisciplinary collaboration with establishment and development of the Centre for Multidisciplinary Environmental Research and Teaching at the University of Helsinki (currently HELSUS), and after that of working outside the University. I am grateful to the Faculty of Theology for offering me numerous inspiring challenges that deeply influenced my growth as an academic scholar during my period as an acting Faculty member, although it started a long leg during which I was not able to carry on with my dissertation at that time. My own research went on during this period through taking part to the international discussions and through the interdisciplinary cooperation at the University of Helsinki. I want to thank my colleagues at the interdisciplinary environmental research and teaching. Working together offered me wider perspectives and also an opportunity to publish together. I wish to acknowledge John Templeton Foundation for offering me an empowering and inspiring a month lasting scholarship on Science and Religion at the Venice Summer School titled “Evolution and Human Uniqueness”. I thank my team leaders there, Professor Michael Ruse and Professor
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Introduction
1 INTRODUCTION

This philosophical study concerns critically the humanist presuppositions of modern ethics from the viewpoint of environmental ethics. More particularly, the study focuses on the concept of moral agency and the philosophical implications of the conceptual shift that will be called for by investigating a large number of studies that have taken a critical stance towards the subject. Ecologically relational agency is an articulation constructed in this study on the basis of the common aspirations of these critical stances with the help of interdisciplinary approaches to philosophical anthropology and the philosophy of mind.

The conception of human nature has been much discussed in environmental philosophy, and relational interpretations are also widely defended. However, the relationality of the operations of moral agency has not as far as I know been scrutinised previously, and thus the perspectives of interactive and systemic explanations of the relational human mind have been missing from the discussion. The purpose of this study is to fill this gap. It will be argued that the conceptual shift concerning the operations of moral deliberation, rationality, autonomy and action, called for by the recent scientific understandings of the nature of mind and agency, have philosophical implications that challenge the self-understanding of modern ethics. If, as I shall argue, relational mental operations question the configuration of an individual as the subject of agency, profound discussion is required concerning, for instance, the idea of responsibilities and the role of ecological and social environments, usually supposed to be external to the mind in moral conduct.

The journal Ethics and the Environment published a thematic number on the topic “The Future of Environmental Philosophy” in 2007. According to the editors, environmental philosophy finds itself at the crossroads: while its importance has significantly increased, and the field has made real progress, it has not found its home among the subjects of “real” philosophy, nor found a ready audience. Among the main reasons is that many environmental philosophers who approach the environmental sciences are, with regard to philosophy, “hostile to the discipline as it is currently

1 The relational features of natural phenomena came to public awareness along with the development of ecological biology, and they were quickly adopted into the philosophy of nature. In environmental philosophy the focus on the relationality of human and nonhuman nature has especially inspired speculative projects in the field. However, a general problem for many of these projects is that the conceptual clarity between normativity and non-normative facts has not been clear, and often “ought” is derived from “is”, which has led them to focus either on speculative philosophical or religious worldviews. See e.g. Naess 1973; 1988; Callcott 1994; 2002; 2008; Fox 2003; Devall 1990; Tucker 2001. For a critical evaluation of speculative environmental philosophy, see Kirkman 2002. Even in this study conceptual clarity is a challenge, since the philosophical dogmatism in the conceptual divisions established in post-Enlightenment modern argumentation only leave a very narrow track for seriously listening to scientific suspicions about the ability of the human mind to work with such concepts. I shall not question the need for conceptual clarity, but I would hope that after 300 years philosophical work could be encouraged to critically discuss the preconditions of modern humanism concerning the possibilities of our own conceptual work.

practiced”.

Environmental philosophers are said to be suspicious about the practical relevance of philosophy in handling complex environmental changes. The topic of the journal reflects the difficulties that many philosophers have had with philosophically valid methods. On a general level, this study takes part in this discussion on the place of environmental ethics within the different fields of philosophy.

Focusing on natural relatedness or ecological structures as philosophically relevant issues has not been an unproblematic project in environmental philosophy. A common line of thought among environmentalists, especially from the 1970s to the 2000s, aspired to make a synthesis of environmental philosophies by appealing to the meaning of ecological relatedness. The core idea of this “speculative environmentalism” can be summarised under three claims: first, the natural world is fundamentally relational; second, moral obligations for humans can be derived from the first claim to preserve and respect this order of nature; and third, if these two are accepted, the environmental crisis can be solved. These claims form a suspect and philosophically debatable foundation for various modes of environmental philosophy. A reason behind deriving obligations from ecological facts, which strikes against conventional conceptual categories in philosophy, is that relationality is thought to imply that ecological structures and natural entities as organisms have an internal unity, and goals and interests of their own. This study, however, takes another starting point.

While following environmental philosophy discussion for three decades, I have become convinced that among the main problems that push environmental philosophy into conceptual difficulties within the fields of philosophy have to do with the mislocated conception of relationality. Relationality – which as such has been quite adequately discussed by environmental philosophers over the last fifty years – is conceptually located most often in the objects of human moral obligations, to the “other” side of moral relationships, or sometimes to human nature. This implies either the project of “humanising the natural others” by claiming their unity and integrity, or the project of “naturalising humans” by claiming that relational human nature causes certain obligations towards the similar external nature. In both cases, the problem remains: relationality, rather than considering it a definition of agency, concerns the nature of things, which thus poses certain obligations for moral agents. This supposition works as one of my basic starting points for this study. It drives me to ask whether it makes any difference for philosophical implications if natural relationality – which according to scientists is a widely accepted fact about natural processes– is scrutinised as a feature of the mental operations by which humans perform moral agency. The question is, can the turn of focus to the concept of human agency clarify the meaning of natural relatedness for environmental ethics in a philosophically sound way.

According to the view taken in this study, environmental philosophy is a field of philosophy that focuses on human conceptualisations and activity from the point of  

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4 Kirkman 2002, 7. For a type of sceptical argument, see, for example, Robert Kirkman’s criticism against the speculative environmentalism in Kirkman 2002.
view of the limits of planet earth and in relation to nonhuman others. Among other things, it is a critical approach to the presuppositions of rationality and human morality. For the purposes of this study I define environmental ethics quite narrowly as a part of environmental philosophy that has a general purpose to sustain philosophically valid and environmentally efficient normative ethics. Normative environmental ethics can thus be seen as a group of strategies for formulating philosophically sound theories of normativity concerning the relationships between human beings and the rest of nature in a way that helps humanity to handle current and future environmental problems. Environmental ethics is thus taken here to have a tendency to defend the critical point of view and normative authority of ethics, which implies that it seeks to defend the autonomy of ethics, but at the same time it has a tendency to defend the scientific plausibility of all presuppositions of an ethical theory in order for it to be environmentally valid. If factual presuppositions are not scientifically justified, it seems implausible to expect that moral conducts can have practical efficiency in regard to the state of the natural environment – in balance with the common aims of ethics defined, for instance, in terms of moral rationality inside the community of human agents. The conditions of human life and action should be plausibly seen as connected with the rest of nature, such as ecosystemic services.

These tendencies draw the discussion in contradictory directions. On the one hand, environmental ethics seeks for moral realism and universal moral rationality, but on the other hand, it seeks for a plausible empirical perspective on the nature of human morality and the operations of agency. The latter implies questioning, for instance, human freedom and the derived idea of autonomy. The wish to defend scientifically plausible explanations of moral reasoning and action seems to contradict the wish to defend the critical point of view and normative guidance. This challenges the possibility of taking environmental conditions as seriously relevant in ethics, otherwise than as the object of voluntary preferences. My hypothesis is that following the commonalities in the line of thought of critical stances towards the modern idea of agency – and developing this idea with the help of current empirical sciences and philosophical studies concerning the links of mental operations with the external environment and the interactive processes providing them – can offer significant conceptual help in this problem.

Moral agency as a concept represents the ideal of human existence. Actual conceptions of moral agency, thus, constitute a normative view of humanness. They also set criteria for granting the membership in the moral community. In modern humanist ethics moral agency marks exceptionality: it is a feature specific to human beings and is not expected to perform elsewhere. Definite elements of the modernist idea of moral agency are autonomy in the strong sense of freedom, isolation from natural contingent contextualities, rationality, and impartiality in deliberation. As they mark, at the same time, the exceptionality of the members of a moral community, the moral relevance of nonhuman entities and the relationships of a

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5 This is, certainly, a limited view, and there are authors who will be excluded because of it. However, as general tendencies are widely shared, they offer a tool to analyse the critical discussion on the limitations of modern humanism.

6 Peterson 2001, 38.
human agent with his or her environment become trivialised in moral discourse. Numerous environmental philosophers and ethicists think that the modern idea of moral agency is suspect: it seems empirically implausible and hinders normative moral theories from dealing with complex, even wicked, environmental problems. In spite of its definite importance and posed criticism, the role of the concepts of moral agency for ethical argumentations concerning environmental ethics has not been well scrutinised.

The modern idea of agency is most clearly criticised by environmental philosophers and ethicists drawing from two, mutually opposing, philosophical traditions: evolutionary naturalism and feminist constructivism. The concept of agency is not usually focused on by moderate arguments that wish to concentrate on practical environmental issues by appealing to established normative theories. However, this turn of focus could, I suppose, help environmental philosophers to advance their arguments. Both of the above critical approaches seek for a more plausible conception of agency without excluding the contextual nature of human activities, but they provide opposing explanations about the nature of ethics and human morality. Despite their incompatibility, they can be seen to develop parallelly the idea of moral agency in the direction of understanding it as relational in some wider sense than merely covering social relations. I shall call this wider sense of relationality to which both critical approaches seem to aim ecological relationality, although it seems that it is not restricted to ecology in the strict biological sense, nor to social ecology. The shared features of their criticisms provoke the question whether following their parallel lines of thought would lead to a converging alternative idea of agency, namely a relational one. In this study, the direction of the two lines of thought will be followed, and the initial idea of ecologically relational moral agency will be constructed on the basis of their parallel ideas and developed with help of external support from natural sciences, such as cognitive science, psychology and anthropology, as well as different fields of philosophy, especially philosophical anthropology, epistemology, and the philosophy of mind and action. As far as I am aware, evolutionary and constructivist criticisms against the modernist idea of moral agency have not previously been examined as partners in the same discussion.

In the concept ecological relationality, the epithet refers, first and foremost, to the systemic ecological structures of the relationships between animals – humans included – and their organic and inorganic environments. Ecology as a term was launched by Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) and was defined as the study of the interrelationships of organisms with their environment and each other. But given that humans are not divided into isolated mental and bodily spheres, in this study, the term ecology also involves an understanding of human social interactions in an ecological way. Such use of the term is sometimes called social ecology. In particular, ecological relationality is used to sustain the idea of agency that extends the individual mind to ecologically structured human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic environments, while relationality in philosophy usually only refers to social relationships. Currently, however, the perspectives on the relationality of cognitive and intentional operations are rich.
It will be argued that agency is a range of functions developed and used in interrelationships with different living and physical partners inside and around the human body, which means that ecological systems and environmental relations are constitutive for agency. And therefore, rather than being an individual in the modernist sense, an agent would be better defined as a knot in a net, by which mental operations are linked with environments of three kinds: environments internal to the body; organic and inorganic external environments; and social and cultural environments developed by the influence of human expressions of agency. According to this line of thought, constitution of the operations of agency can be claimed to be embedded in their socio-ecological environments. Each of the systemic environments also involves timely influences in relational agency, such as genetic heritage, evolutionary memory, and historical traditions. As far as the constitutive relationships are ecologically structured, the function of agency relies on the resilience of relevant ecosystems: environmental relationships of a moral agent cannot be considered to be relationships between a subject and an object in the usual sense. One way that such relationships can be seen is to compare them with the symbiosis between a pregnant mother and her foetus.

The main task for this study is to clarify conceptually the meaning of moral agency in terms of ecological relationality for the relevance of the environment in ethics, and for environmental ethics in particular. This task consists of two parts. First, to construct the idea of moral agency as ecologically relational on the basis of the parallel lines of thought in two critical stances towards the modern conception of moral agency, namely evolutionary naturalism and ecofeminist constructivism. Second, to analyse the philosophical implications of this relational shift in moral naturalism and moral constructivism as frameworks for environmental ethics. The interest in the latter is especially in whether these implications can offer possibilities for balancing the contradictory tendencies in environmental ethics to defend the empirically plausible idea of agency on the one hand, and moral realism on the other. My supposition is that if such a balance can be approached it will also have relevance from the wider perspective of philosophical ethics.

As far as I know, the idea of relational moral agency has not been articulated before this study. Among those few scholars who take a somewhat similar approach

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7 Besides that the body-mind connection is close, an individual body includes various biological and ecological structures including external entities, with which the mental operations interact. For example, weight of a body consists largely of bacteria, viruses and microbial flora, which have their own genes and ecosystems, but they much regulate not only the body functions but the mental functions, too. These bodily partners are not only internal to an individual but connect the body and mind with the external reality by moving in and out between the bodies and between the body and its external biological environments. Resilience of these ecosystems of the body is a requirement for health and life, and so are the external ecosystems in which the body lives. See, e.g. M. Wilson, *Microbial inhabitants of humans: their ecology and role in health and disease* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). Besides this, mental operations take place in direct interactions with the living and inorganic environments of an agent.

8 In environmental philosophy, social ecology is used to refer to a view that applies an evolutionary perspective and the ecological idea of some type of uniqueness in diversity concerning social and political issues. The concept of society is considered in social ecology usually to cover not only human communities of social interaction but also ecological systems, including non-human societies and physical conditions. It thus emphasises well the impossibility of separating an individual or society from its natural environment: both are thoroughly ecological and belong to nature. See, e.g. Clark 1998, 354-5. Since social ecology is often used in a more definite sense to refer to Murray Bookchin’s politically oriented social ecology, I mainly avoid using this term.
to my own, Anna L. Peterson compares the concepts of human agent in different types of environmental ethics in her study *Being Human: Ethics, Environment, and Our Place in the World* (2001). Peterson does not, however, question the idea of agency as an internal feature of a subject. In this sense, her focus still lies in human nature, and does not fully embrace the turn to moral agency. In this study, I shall argue that the focus should be on the concept of agency, not just the subject. Therefore, the frameworks of the two strategies for environmental ethics that both take steps towards developing a relational conception of agency, namely naturalism and constructivism, are worth analysing parrellly. I shall argue that the conceptual shifts concerning the relationality of operations of moral deliberation and action defended or formulated by various environmental ethicists drawing from these frameworks can together pose a substantial challenge to modern ethics.

The main research questions for this study are the following: (1) How do the strategies for environmental ethics conceptualise human moral agency and what possible problems and promises are included in the scientific plausibility or philosophical implictions of these conceptions? (2) What kind of scientific and philosophical support is there for the aspirations of the critical stances against the modernist notion to develop a relational idea of agency, and how might such an idea be articulated? (3) What would be the philosophical implications of adopting an ecologically relational idea of moral agency in moral naturalism on the one hand, and moral constructivism on the other, especially as frameworks for environmental ethics? (4) What are the prospects for an agent-focused ethical theory formulated on the idea of relational moral agency being a realist theory? This study thus focuses on the background presuppositions and structures of environmental ethics and will not take part in popular discussions on the values and rights of nature. The conceptual shifts will certainly have an influence in axiological and normative debates, but these shifts can only emerge after proper conceptual analysis.

The sources of the study are here introduced by following the main research questions. For my main sources concerning the first research question on critical stance strategies in environmental ethics, I use studies which deal with standard forms of sociobiological environmental ethics, especially those of Edward O. Wilson, Elliot Sober and Michael Ruse,9 and evolutionary psychology by Jerome Barkow, Leda Cosmides and John Tooby.10 Among the critics of standard interpretations, I use especially studies by philosophers Mary Midgley,11 whose feminist approach crosses the borders between feminist constructivism and evolutionary naturalism; Philip Kitcher, who develops progressive naturalist ethics,12 and Christopher Preston, who defends a relational approach to evolutionary ethics.13 For my analytical tools I refer, for example, to the critical analysis of evolutionary ethics by Lisa Sideris,14 and works by evolutionary anthropologist Michael Tomasello, primatologist Frans de Waal and

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9 Sociobiology has been the most influential evolutionary approach in environmental ethics. See, e.g., Wilson 1975; 1978; 1998; Sober & Wilson 1998; Sober 1994; Ruse 1995; 1998; 1999; 2010.
10 Barkow, Cosmides & Tooby 1992; Cosmides, Leda & Tooby 2013.
evolutionary biologist Richard Lewontin.\footnote{15} For studies dealing with ecofeminist constructivism, I attach importance to works by Karen Warren and Val Plumwood,\footnote{16} because they both focus on the relational structure of reasoning. I also refer to works on ecofeminism by Anna Peterson, Chris Cuomo, Carolyn Merchant, Eva Kittay and Diana Meyers,\footnote{17} and works by Mary Mellor and Bonnie Mann which focus on material feminism.\footnote{18}

Since the second research question requires external qualification for the idea of relational agency, I answer it by using sources from disciplines beyond environmental philosophy in an interdisciplinarily way. Concerning human nature and mental operations I exemplify current evidences by referring to studies on genetics, ecology, cognitive science, evolutionary, psychological and philosophical anthropology, epistemology as well as philosophies of mind and action. The criteria for selecting sources here are that in addition to their scientific credibility, the studies deal with the question of the role of relationships or environmental conditions in operations relevant for moral agency, such as reasoning and intending. It is worth noticing that the studies that I bring together here are connected with various different discussions that are rich in themselves: (a) For studies on biological inheritance, development and ecology I refer to works on developmental systems and niche construction.\footnote{19} (b) On the origins of the human moral ability in human ultra-sociality I refer to studies on evolutionary anthropology and moral psychology, especially those by Michael Tomasello and Jonathan Haidt.\footnote{20} (c) Among studies on the extended mind, the embodied mind and enactivism I use especially Mark Rowlands, Andy Clark, David Chalmers for the extended mind thesis, Mark Johnson and George Lakoff for the embodied mind, and Alva Noë for enactivism.\footnote{21} A kind of common groundwork for these discussions is Francisco Varela’s, Eleanor Rosh’s and Evan Thompson’s The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience (1991),\footnote{22} which first

\footnote{17} Peterson 2001; Cuomo 1998; Merchant 1993; Kittay 1999; Meyers 1989; 2000.
\footnote{18} Mellar 1997; 2000; Mann 2005.
\footnote{21} The extended mind thesis was originally articulated by Andy Clark and David Chalmers in “The Extended Mind,” Analysis 58 (1998): 10-23. As the discussion on enactivism is currently not easy to restrict to one clearly distinguished position, and many of the ideas are shared by the other two discussions, I shall just refer to the current state of enactivism on the basis of some general ideas of, for instance, Alva Noë and Mark Rowlands. For recent discussion, see, e.g Rowlands 2006, 2009a, 2009b, 2010 and 2013; Noë 2004; Colombetti & Torrance 2009; Urban 2015. The third line of discussion with basically the same origins, which has influenced the discussions on environmental ethics will be referred to here by the idea of the embodied mind. The groundwork of that discussion is George Lakoff’s and Mark Johnson’s Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought (New York: Basic Books 1999). See also Johnson 1987; 2007; 2014; Preston 2003; 2009; Rowlands1999; 2003; 2010.
\footnote{22} Varela, Rosh & Thompson 1991. See also Varela & Thompson 2001. The discussions of the extended mind and enactivism have a common background in the idea of the embodied mind. Currently, as the discussions have widened, more distinct positions have been formulated, but they still share much of the basic grounds and ideas. They are mainly based on the same empirical evidences about the mental operations as interactively intertwined with the elements of external world.
introduced enactivism. (d) On interactive, relational and environmentalist knowledge formation and reasoning, I refer to studies by Mark Rowlands, Christopher Preston, Lorraine Code, Helen Longino, Ivana Marková and Albert Borgmann.\textsuperscript{23} For studies on philosophical discussions of collective agency, I use Raimo Tuomela’s, Michael Bratman’s and David Copp’s works.\textsuperscript{24} For studies focusing on non-absolute or relational freedom in philosophy of action, I use, for instance, Susan Wolf’s, Robert Solomon’s, and Naomi Sheman’s works.\textsuperscript{25} Relational interpretations especially in feminist philosophy, is well exemplified in Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self (2000), edited by Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar,\textsuperscript{26} although this discussion mainly lacks the viewpoint of material relationality.

Since for the third research question I analyse the implications of the relational shift in the ethical frameworks, I use sources that represent more general level discussion on ethical naturalism and constructivism, along with the already-mentioned sources. I refer most notably, to Philip Kitcher’s work on Humean naturalism;\textsuperscript{27} to virtue ethicists’ work, especially that of Philippa Foot and Martha Nussbaum, on neo-Aristotelian virtue naturalism;\textsuperscript{28} to Christine Korsgaard’s work on neo-Kantian constructivism;\textsuperscript{29} and to David Copp’s work, which focuses on hybrid metaethical constructivism.\textsuperscript{30} For the third and fourth research questions, I also refer to literature that helps clarify certain philosophical implications, especially to John Hyman’s work on knowledge as ability,\textsuperscript{31} feminist epistemology and Karen Barad’s study on agential realism.\textsuperscript{32} To discuss the shifting position between naturalism and constructivism I use Robert Kirkman’s work on Darwinian humanism.\textsuperscript{33}

For my fourth question, I use Korsgaard’s and Nussbaum’s works as possible theoretical frameworks for constructing a relational approach to environmental ethics. By focusing on them I bring the lines of thought of this study back to questions central for modern ethics, namely the source of normativity, moral rationality, and the question of moral truth.

The main aim of this study is to conceptually clarify the meaning of relational moral agency for environmental ethics. To do this I analyse philosophical implications in theories of ethics and their possibilities for offering a conceptually satisfying framework for normativity in human – nature relationships. The method

\textsuperscript{23} Rowlands 1999; 2003; 2005; 2009b; Preston 2003; 2009; Code 2005; 2006b; 2008; Longino 2002a; Marková 2016; Borgmann 1984. Epistemic processes and reasoning are as central cognitive operations also connected, of course, with other discussions.


\textsuperscript{25} See Wolf 1986; Solomon 2003; Sheman 1996. See also Fischer 2006.


\textsuperscript{27} Kitcher 2007; 2011. See also McShane 2011; Allhoff 2009.


\textsuperscript{31} Hyman 2015. See also Margaret Olivia Little. Little 2007a.


\textsuperscript{33} Kirkman 2002; 2007; 2009.
for this study is twofold. The main method is based on careful conceptual and argumentative analysis of the above-mentioned literature. But in addition to these analytical methods, the materials are also used constructively, since the main conceptual idea has not been articulated in the previous literature. The constructive method is used especially for the second and the fourth research questions. Although the method is partly constructive, the aim is not to create a fully articulated relational theory of ethics. Instead, the purpose is to initially sketch how such a hypothetical position could survive as the option for an environmental ethics that wishes to defend normative authority and critical autonomy of ethics. For an environmental ethics that identifies itself among the environmental sciences, besides philosophy, these wishes imply truth value of moral concepts, but at the same time, empirically plausible and naturally explainable moral reasoning. My analytical method casts light on the general purpose of this study to fill the gap in environmental philosophy concerning the concept of relationality in moral agency. Analytical and constructive methods together offer further steps towards conceptual clarity in these issues.

The structure of the study is as follows. Chapter 2 deals with the definitions of the concept of moral agency in environmental ethics. The mainstream modern concept of moral agency (section 2.2) and two of its critical strands, evolutionary naturalism (section 2.3) and ecofeminist constructivism (section 2.4), will be scrutinised. After briefly introducing the idea of ontological relationality as it is commonly understood in environmental discussion (section 2.5), evolutionary naturalism and ecofeminist constructivism will be compared as parallel lines of thought towards a relational notion of agency (section 2.6). As their parallel or shared points of criticism refer heavily to the concept of relationality, which is a fairly frequently used concept in environmental philosophy, the section also clarifies the idea of agential relationality.

In chapter 3, the conception of ecologically relational moral agency will be constructed in the light of selected studies from the empirical natural sciences, such as evolutionary anthropology and cognitive science, as well as social sciences and humanities, such as psychological and philosophical anthropology, social philosophy, and discussions on collective agency. This chapter explains the relational nature of the significant processes of moral agency: the formation of practical identity (section 3.2), epistemic processes and reasoning (section 3.3), and intentional action (section 3.4). Issues of freedom, individual versus collective agency and autonomy will be focused on here. Where the used sources offer empirical evidence in support of the pursuit of relational view, then this question is posed: What kind of shift does this scientifically plausible, relational conception of moral agency imply in explanations of ethics (section 3.5).

Chapter 4 deals with the philosophical implications of the relational notion of agency for ethical theories, first in moral naturalism and then in moral constructivism. In the case of moral naturalism, influences of the relational shift will be exemplified by examples of Humean empiricist naturalism and neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics (section 4.2). In the case of constructivism, the implications will be analysed especially through testing how a relational shift would influence Christine Korsgaard’s neo-Kantian ethics. The specific interest will be Korsgaard’s idea of moral authority in the constitution of agency, her constructivist view of the source of
obligation, and the neo-Kantian transcendental argument (section 4.3). After that, the implications of the conceptual shift in the mutual relationship between naturalism and constructivism will be briefly discussed (section 4.4).

In chapter 5, the focus is on analysing the possibilities of a distinctive relational approach to the theory of ethics. The main question that arises for such a theory concerns its compatibility with moral realism. Although the method here is constructive, the aim is not to create a fully articulated relational theory of ethics. Instead, the purpose is to initially sketch how such a hypothetical position could survive as an option for environmental ethics that wishes a theory of ethics to defend normative authority and critical autonomy of ethics, which I take to mean that moral concepts have truth value, and, at the same time, empirically plausible, naturally explainable moral reasoning (section 5.2). In the last section of this study (section 2.6), the most plausible approach for a relational theory of ethics, which is a virtue ethical approach, will be discussed as the possible ground for constructing relational ethics, partly with the help of Nussbaum’s capability approach.
2 MORAL AGENCY IN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

2.1 INTRODUCTION: HUMANISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Environmental ethics that takes place in the framework or modern ethics either adopts a mainstream humanism, based on the uniqueness of humankind and exceptional free human agency, or denies it. Environmental ethics as a distinctive field has often been thought to involve the latter. A famous argument against humanism, known as the last man’s argument, was put forward by Australian philosopher and logician Richard Routley in the World Congress of Philosophy (1973). He asks us to imagine what would be the right way to act in a situation where you are the last person on Earth, and the rest of humankind are eradicated. Are there any things left that you should do? Does it make any ethical difference whether the last person eliminates (painlessly) all the nonhuman life that is still left, or not? Routley argues that according to “basic chauvinism” it is permissible, but on environmental grounds it is wrong. Just humans or gods matter for moral justification. From this point of view, environmental philosophers have constantly striven for the construction of a distinctive environmental ethics in order to find an alternative to the humanist point of view.

In this chapter I argue that the quest for distinctive environmental ethics is incorrectly posed. A widely shared view is that environmental ethics is not just a field of applied ethics, and the practical efficiency of ethical theories in environmental issues requires a critical stance against modernist theories, which are often inefficient and incapable of critical guidance in the complex issues of environmental responsibility. An environmentalist moral philosopher Stephen M. Gardiner argues that it is justified to talk about the tragedy of ethics: current problems pose challenges which ethical theories are not equipped to meet. The tragedy has to do, as Routley claimed, with the lack of a recognised role for nonhuman nature in ethics. Even the mainstream modernists have recognised the limits of the modern ethical framework. John Rawls, for example, remarks that “we should recall here the limits of a theory of justice. Not only are many aspects of morality left aside, but no account can be given of right conduct in regard to animals and the rest of nature.” According to classical social contract theories, binding obligations, such as duty, right, law, and justice, always hold true within the framework of a contract, that is, between those regarded

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34 Routley 2003.
35 Gardiner 2011; Cripps 2013; Jamieson 2014; Foster 2015; Nurmi 2010.
36 Gardiner especially criticises the ability of Western moral systems to deal with issues that require a global perspective, collective responsibilities, or the perspective of future generations: the moral culture is not attuned to such perspectives (Gardiner 2011, 22-44). His analysis of the theoretical tragedy of ethics rests partly on game theory, which sets certain limits to his argument, but however, it also hits the target in many respects, especially concerning the issues of a global political perspective. See, for example, Gardiner 2011, 50-72.
37 Rawls 2003, 448.
as relevant partners of the moral community. The function of obligations is to evaluate relations between free and rational agents. Despite this, I argue that the solution should not be sought by counting extended objects into the moral community, but instead, by questioning the specific agential presupposition behind the logic of modern mainstream ethics: the notion of the moral agency of an individual human being as the unquestionable continuation of the divine legislative will. This means, however, questioning the presuppositions of the mainstream modern framework of ethics, which has offered politically decent practical tools for normative discourse.

Two distinctive alternative frameworks for environmental ethics that notably wish to avoid modern humanism are postmodern constructivism on the one hand, and evolutionary naturalism on the other. They both offer an option to escape humanism, but also include problems from the viewpoint of environmental ethics: antirealism lurking in the postmodern framework and naturalistic fallacy and the problem of deriving 'ought' from 'is' lurking in the naturalistic framework.

In what follows, my purpose is to analyse what kind of conception of moral agency is included in different argumentations for environmental ethics. They are divided into three strategies for environmental ethics, each depicting a different conception of human moral agency. By calling them strategies I refer to their aspiration to integrate the issues concerning relationships between the human agent and other parts of nature in moral discourse in a plausible and normatively non-instrumental way. The conceptions of moral agency analysed here are exceptional human agency (section 2.2), which is represented by argumentations that stick to mainstream modern humanism in one way or another, evolutionary naturalism (section 2.3) and ecofeminist constructivism (section 2.4), which both question some of the main features of exceptionalism, and hence, challenge some of the widely adopted structures of the ethical theories adopting it. I make use here of the anthropology-based categorising of environmental ethics introduced by the ecofeminist and theologian Anna L. Peterson. She distinguishes between four anthropological models used in environmental ethics: (1) human exceptionalism, (2) social constructionism, (3) socio-biological anthropology (in this study a more widely evolutionary view), and (4) relational anthropology. However, my definition of relational anthropology in this study will not be the same as hers. I shall briefly

38 Midgley 1995, 90. Good with regard to other types of relationships should then be derived from the good of the primary moral relationships. While human individuals are treated morally in their own right, others are relevant instrumentally as conditions of life or action.
41 In section 2.5 I shall briefly introduce the loose group of ontological views to which relational agency most commonly refers, Peterson included. As the main thrust is different in this study, I shall not go into details about this approach. The focus in my thesis is basically on the functions and processes of moral reasoning and action. I also take moral agency as a function that defines the nature of ethics, while Peterson describes popular conceptions expressed at the time her book was published. She refers to the ontologically relational subject in Asian philosophy, for example, while in my study this refers to the role
introduce the most usual, ontological type of relational moral self in section 2.5, but the main reason is to point out the difference compared to my argument from it. In the following chapter 3 I shall then start constructing the conception of relational agency. The starting point towards the ecologically relational view of agency will be in the parallel aspirations of evolutionary and ecofeminist approaches, which will be introduced in section 2.6.42

2.2 EXCEPTIONAL HUMANISM AND ITS EXTENSIONAL COUNTERPARTS IN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

2.2.1 HUMAN UNIQUENESS IN MODERN LOGIC
Politically mainstream moral theories have their origins in the modern humanist tradition, and the included idea of human uniqueness entailing exceptional moral agency. Environmental ethics thus faces the exceptional features of humanity, rationality and free will, as the borders of moral standing and community: the terms of binding and serious obligations – such as duty, right, law, and justice – are thought to hold only within the community of free and rational agents. The most significant borderline between those deserving moral attention and those not is, thus, derived from the definition of the members of the moral community, namely human beings. The focus of modern theories is on the duties and responsibilities for other moral persons.43 This, of course, can imply duties concerning other entities, too. According to Immanuel Kant’s famous argument, indirect duties towards nonhuman animals are based on analogy between animals and human beings. Normativity of such duties emerges from the analogy with moral agents. Even though we cannot have direct duties towards non-rational beings, we can have indirect duties towards (non-rational) animals for rational moral reasons.44 The duty not to mistreat persons, directly or indirectly, is clear for rational moral agents, and by argument from of ecological and social relationships in agency. My view will be further discussed in the following chapters. Peterson’s categories are, however, useful, since they uncover certain supposed prerequisites of agency and moral community.

42 The perspective taken in this study to the strategies for environmental ethics is based on my finding that both extreme ends of the horseshoe-curve figure of the strategies address conceptual criticism of the exceptional view of agency: they share a strong suspicion of the possibilities of modernist humanism. This is interesting, because otherwise they oppose each other. But since they give up the idea of man offered by traditional humanism they converge. In view of this, their arguments that are usually classified as opposing strategies, can be seen as two sides of the same strategy.

43 Besides philosophical backgrounds, it is also on account of historical conditions that modern ethics, such as Kantianism, social contract theories and utilitarianism, developed a strong humanism. Theories were required to consider social fragility after the Thirty Years War had ruined trust in common values. Thomas Hobbes’s and John Locke’s social contract theories turned their focus on this social challenge. The collapse of a common moral ethos and the metaphysical connection between nature and the good called for new foundations for shared norms. Two influential general lines of thought arose, which could be seen to express the mental ethos of their time: David Hume’s moral naturalism that separated motivating passions (ought) from (instrumental) reason (is), and Immanuel Kant’s rationalist ethics that distinguished duties from God’s will as well as from plural conceptions of good.

44 Kant, Metaphysics of Morals 6:442-443, Kant 1996, 192-3. According to Kant, “the duties to animals are duties only insofar as they have reference to ourselves. Hence we shall reduce all duties to those towards other people.” Lectures on Ethics 27: 413, Kant 1997, 177.
analogy, indirect duties towards animals are justified: maltreatment of such animals would lead, before long, to maltreatment of other humans. Hence, we should respect non-human others insofar as they include manifestations of human nature. According to Kant, domestic animals should, perhaps particularly for this reason, be treated “just as if they were members of the household”.

The two common ways for environmental ethics to overcome the dichotomy between exceptional human members of the moral community and other beings, therefore, are either to extend the moral domain by moving the borderline that marks moral standing, or to give up the idea of the exceptionality of humans as moral subjects. The strengths of Enlightenment ethics were in universalising moral discourse on the basis of common reason, and in detaching it from metaphysical and essentialist links. But the claim for justified moral conduct to be universalised implies a shared rationality among the members of the moral community, or a shared nature as the ground of morally counting interests. Reciprocity can be universal and all-encompassing only in the community of relevantly similar members. Conversely, the sphere of ethics can extend to include nonhumans via conceptual similarity. The method of modernising moral discourse is based on the existence of relevant features that make the moral status of individual entities equal. At the same time, non-individual things as well as other parties are excluded. The ability of derived normative theories to deal with the ecological and systemic changes following from collective human actions, or with the relationship of human individuals within their ecological contexts, is limited. Therefore, these theories appear toothless to provide efficient guidance in the most acute issues of environmental ethics, such as climate ethics. Human-non-human relationships become trivialised when confronted with social relationships or individual wellbeing. A drastic challenge is, thus, posed to the

45 Kant, *Lectures on Ethics* 27:710, in Kant 1997, 434: “Any action whereby we may [...] treat them without love, is demeaning to ourselves. It is inhuman and contains an analogy of violation of the duty to ourselves”.

46 *Lectures on Ethics* 27:459, Kant 1997, 212: “Since animals are an analogue of humanity, we observe duties to mankind when we observe them as analogues to this, and thus cultivate our duties to humanity.” And “if the acts of animals arise out of the same principium from which human actions spring, and the animal actions are analogues of this, we have duties to animals, in that we thereby promote the cause of humanity.” This has been expressed perhaps more concretely in an elder translation: “Animal nature has analogies toward human nature, and by doing our duties to animals in respect of manifestations which correspond to manifestations of human nature, we indirectly do our duty to humanity.” *Lectures on Ethics* (trans. Louis Infield. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979), 239. As a moral community is a group of relevantly similar members, a moral discourse dealing with issues concerning that community is incapable of dealing with human-nature relationships. But indirect duties are justified by respect of manifestations of human nature in animal nature.


48 If properties shared with moral agents provide moral standing, an extension of the moral domain is justified. Discussion on individual rights, especially, calls for clear definition of the moral subject: what is needed for a being to have rights. According to the humanist ethos that became dominant in modern ethics, also people who are incapable of reciprocity belong to the moral community as subjects of moral duties. Humanity is valued despite the possible lack of action capacity or actual consciousness. Because cases of severely incapable people and people with permanently lowered consciousness theoretically challenge modern models, the belonging of all, special groups included, to the moral community is often carefully justified – for instance, in Kant’s and Rawls’s theories.
typical modern logic of universalising ethics; in light of the current situation, universalising ethics seems to fail to protect life and social coherence. It is inefficient in critical aim setting, value rationality and conceptualisation of the good and the right in the changing conditions on earth.

The idea that duties to nonhumans are indirect derives from the premodern outlook, but the ethical implications from that depend on the adopted view of human beings and the source of moral reasons. Distinctive for modern ways of interpreting indirectness of duties to nonhumans are to consider humans as the source of moral reasons and the individualist conception of human agent. In spite of partly appealing to its classical and medieval predecessors, Kantian idea of indirect duties to non-rational beings is an individualist approach that has even more limited possibilities for dealing with ecological issues. To compare, the Medieval Thomist view repudiates mistreatment of animals for reasons derived from the telos of the human agent: mistreating animals makes the human agent less virtuous as a person and restricts achievement of her telos. Thus, bad treatment of nonhumans corrupts human intellect and weakens further reasoning; virtuousness is a condition of correct reasoning. Kant, on the other hand, repudiates mistreatment of animals because it leads to mistreatment of our fellow humans. The justification thus lies in the moral community and (indirect) duties derived from the analogical features of animals that remind us of other humans. The conceptual framework for human agency thus plays a crucial role for the normative outcomes. This should be seen as the key reason to focus on the conceptions of human agency in environmental ethics, and therefore, the agent-focused strategies discussed in this study criticise the modern framework.

Anthropocentrism can be defined either as a notion of justification, or as a metaethical position. As a justificatory theory it refers to humans as the source of moral reasons and value. It thus focuses on the content of moral conduct derived from those who have the status of being moral partners. Modern humanism is anthropocentric in a justificatory sense. On the other hand, anthropocentrism as a metaethical position refers to moral language and knowledge: moral deliberation is limited to the perspective of the agent, and therefore, each actual conduct represents,

49 The reasons given in premodern ethics for neglecting animals as moral partners are metaphysical: different modes of life have different purposes. For example, Thomas Aquinas argues, leaning on Aristotle, that humans and animals cannot be fellows, because everything is for something, and lower forms of life are there to serve higher forms. Unlike humans as images of God, animals are naturally adapted to only serve others. See, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, 64, a. 1. For Thomas’s explanation why moral duties towards non-human beings can only be indirect, see *Summa Theologie*, 2a2ae, questions 25 and 64. Cited in Työrinoja 1996.

50 Medieval arguments about the (indirect) duties to nonhuman beings are misunderstood if they are seen as arguments about the criteria for moral consideration. Moreover, the Thomistic argument concerns the untouchable structure of nature, and the connection between the natural and moral spheres. It cannot be applied to contemporary ethics because of included metaphysical connections. The empirically proved rationality of animals does not play any role in the normative claims of the Thomistic view. Stump 2003, 103-6, 278-80.

51 It is worth acknowledging that environmentalists often have a romanticised view of the premodern outlook, in which the philosophy of nature, the philosophy of mind and ethics go hand in hand. This has hampered a nuanced analysis of the relevance of historical debates. Despite this, the history of moral philosophy elucidates reasons that made moral agency an isolated ideal in the midst of hostile contingences of nature and help in identifying points of criticism. Relevant points of history can be identified by restricting the focus to the conceptual problems discussed currently with regard to sustainability, instead of opening the whole palette including metaphysical views.
in one way or another, human prescriptions. Metaethical anthropocentrism focuses on the nature of ethics and its conceptual limits due to the adopted view of moral agent; it refers to an agency-focused self-understanding of ethics. This is an important distinction that elucidates the difference between agent-based ethics and humanism. Justificatory anthropocentrism is metaethically universalist and demands impartiality in moral consideration. As this is usually considered an equal consideration of those having a similar moral status, it offers a justified way to extend the sphere of moral standing to those other-than-humans that are recognised to be in line with humans in relevant respects.

The commonly shared view in Western moral philosophy is that humans are unique natural beings: they have an exceptional moral agency that provides them with the ability to act for moral reasons. Humans are on a continuum with other animals on account of their nature, but are exceptional on account of their moral agency, which signifies the fundamental dichotomy of the modern idea of man. This dichotomy is at the core of the logic of modern ethics, and as an implication, the conceptual gap between a moral agent and the rest of the (contingent) world is among its fundamental preconditions: agents must consider themselves detached, isolated and above the various natural and social webs in order to practice their autonomy and act morally. Contingent issues derived from material and social contextuality are stripped away from a human being when considered as a moral agent. Defined as non-contingent, moral agency depicts the ideal for humans to transcend their nature as “super-humans”. This is the case, for instance, in Kant’s ethics: moral agency considered as detached from environmental contexts implies an ideal that does not encourage improved relations with ecological others. For an environmentalist who is concerned about the correct understanding of nature both in and outside of a being, the modern view of a human agent may be inconvenient. It seems scientifically implausible – if we take a moral agent to be a natural human being, a member of a certain mammal species, rather than a non-natural entity. Although the essentialism of human nature is rejected in modern ethics, the concept of a moral agent may still be essentialist. Since moral agency is not expected to appear in other forms of life, humans have a special status and a unique worth: they form a moral community of exceptional beings with mutual responsibilities. The logic of moral reasons and even the source of normativity is in modern theories internal to the moral community.

The historical baggage of humanism in modern ethics descends from the conceptual divergence between the philosophies of nature and mind (concerning the activity of human autonomous operations), and the operations of will and intellect in the mind.\footnote{An important historical step in the philosophy of mind was William Ockham’s voluntarism, according to which the human will represents an exception in the world on account of its ability to reach beyond the causalities of nature. But the culmination point came later through the influence of Renaissance humanism. As the will was an exceptional part of human mind, separation between free will and instrumental rationality divided the human agent internally. During the following centuries, several other ideas were developed that strengthened the dichotomised picture of a moral agent, for example, René Descartes’s internalism and epistemological scepticism, David Hume’s moral philosophy, especially his view of motivational externalism, and Immanuel Kant’s conception of radical autonomy. In the field of philosophy of nature, separation gained one of its culmination points in Bacon’s mechanistic natural philosophy.} The first foundations for modern ethics were laid in the late medieval
conflict between *via antiqua* and *via moderna*. Two significant new lines of thought were united in *via moderna*: (a) suspicion about universals and eternal essences,\(^{53}\) and (b) belief in the strict causal determination of physical nature.\(^{54}\) Together they influenced the self-understanding of ethics in many ways. Among other things, the tension between the human mind and physical matter was highlighted: unlike matter, the mind was conceived as being located beyond the mechanisms of causal determination. Important philosophical implications of the victory of *via moderna* from an environmental point of view concerned philosophical anthropology: (1) agents (as well as objects) were described as individuals, (2) the processes of valuing and deliberation were defined as free actions of will, and (3) mind and matter were ontologically and functionally divided. The concept of a moral agent absorbed the three isms: individualism, voluntarism, and dualism. As a consequence, morality was detached not just from nonhuman nature but also from the natural sides of human agents.\(^{55}\)

These conceptual changes paved the way for the new type of natural sciences, especially for the practical use of natural sciences to manipulate the environmental conditions of life, and for the mental options for human beings freely designing their own lives and their conditions. The idea that the actual world is contingent rather than necessary, and that the goodness of natural world does not result from God’s wisdom but from God’s free choice encouraged humans to conceive of their freedom as creative.\(^{56}\) The idea that humans can and may use their own freedom to cultivate and construct the world in accordance with their own mind took its full formulation in Renaissance humanism. The writings of Italian Renaissance humanist Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-94) express how classical humanism ended up holding the mental capacities of human agents to be nearly omnipotent. Pico’s ideas (the immensity of the mind, the insatiability of curiosity, the infallibility of the memory, and confidence in one’s intellectual capacities to fashion oneself in any way one wished) did not survive for long, but the basic line of thought, especially concerning the will remained for a long time. According to Pico, freedom of will relieves a human of the laws of nature.\(^{57}\) As a consequence, the conceptual structure of moral

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\(^{53}\) Without general concepts individual beings can be identified in some species or categories like “morally counting” solely by the aid of empirically evidenced qualities. Työrinoja 1996, 48-9.

\(^{54}\) This influenced epistemology: in *via moderna* knowledge of nature is true *a posteriori*.

\(^{55}\) Työrinoja 1996, especially 53-6. Since the structure of the earth does not reflect “the best possible world”, but rather, the created world is the best possible world, “because God chose it”, this allows us to think that respect for this particular world is justified only through respect for God’s will. Then, if God does not exist, it is the task of the best possible legislator (a human being) to choose what kind of world is the best one and design it.

\(^{56}\) The idea is summarised in the passage from Pico della Mirandola’s *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486) which describes God’s words to Adam after creation: “He therefore took man, this creature of indeterminate image, set him in the middle of the world, and said to him: ‘We have given you, Adam, no fixed seat or form of your own, nor talent peculiar to you alone. This we have done so that whatever seat, whatever form, whatever talent you may judge desirable, these same may you have and possess according to your desire and judgement. Once defined, the nature of all other beings is constrained within the laws We have prescribed for them. But you, constrained by no limits, may determine your nature for yourself, according to your own free will, in whose hands We have placed you. We have set you at the centre of the world so that from there you may more easily gaze upon whatever it contains. We have made you neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that you may, as the free and extraordinary shaper of yourself, fashion yourself in whatever form you prefer. It will be in your power to degenerate
philosophy asserted an active role for human voluntary actions, while the other partners in the action became objectified into passivity.

In contrast to premodern ethics, the authority of principles and moral codes in modern ethics are based on the sovereignty of those who exercise free will. Typical examples of this kind of position are, of course, Kantian formalism and contractarianism, such as the wide reflective equilibrium formulated by Rawls: the source of moral reason is grounded on expressions of human legislative will. This has its predecessor in theological ethics, divine command theory, through which it is connected to the historical tradition that dichotomises between rationality and the will. Divine command theory is based on the distinction made between God’s intelligence and God’s will, and the focus turned to God’s dictating will as the only source of obligations.\(^58\) In modern ethics, correspondingly, free will is appreciated as the source of obligations and the core of being human, while instrumental reason directs the means. In accordance with that, respect for nature can result from the human act of valuing only, or possibly from nonhuman valuing, but not from reason.\(^59\)

But more influential than that, is the implication in the concept of human agency. It becomes heavily divided into two realms: contingent, empirically perceived and causally determined natural agency, and free, moral agency. This influences in definitions of concepts central to moral agency, such as autonomy and reasoning. In post-Kantian ethics, especially, reasoning should direct itself to contingent issues since moral truths are beyond reason. The general line of thought in modern ethics is to consider acts of an autonomous will as dictating the moral contents, while reason concerns the means for making various acts of will coherent: cognitive operations offer information but do not have an influence in what one wants. Reason and will are the two features considered to make human nature capable of providing moral agency – or at least either reason or the will. Theoretically, modern ethics thus takes two lines of thought: moral rationalism, such as Kant’s ethics, and the sentimentalist tradition, such as Hume’s ethics, which focuses on emotions and will as empiric issues. To be sure, however, the element of freedom of will is the key for both: for a rationalist tradition it appears in the form of autonomy.

It has been common to blame modern humanism for human-nature dualism, but the agent-focused environmental strategy discussed in this study argues that dichotomies splitting a man from the inside play a more important role.\(^60\) The conception of the moral self has been widely recognised as important for the environmental functioning of a theory by environmental philosophers, but most often

\(^58\) This has its historical origins in the debate between Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus on God’s freedom from the world he has created. The debate changed the framework of ethics from being the cultivation of the intellect to voluntarist ethics. See fn. 62.

\(^59\) Non-human agents capable of setting down ends are, however, so few that basing environmental ethics on them would be suspect.

\(^60\) For different types of examples in which this kind of claim is present, see Cooecelbergh 2012 (relationality, phenomenology), Holland, B. 2012 (human virtue approach), Kirkman 2009 (Darwinian humanism) Peteron 2001 (relationality, ecotheology), Mann 2005 (material feminism), Preston 2002 (place-based ethics), Plumwood 2002 (eco-feminism) and Midgley 1978 (evolutionary feminism).
the offered alternatives call for help from ontological revisions of the framework.\textsuperscript{61} While ontological approaches provide speculative discourse, the question here mainly concerns a revised, empirically plausible understanding of moral reasoning and action. The question is whether a human agent can be separated from human nature, or whether this is an idealised view that misguides rational deliberation.

If the moral theory is based on the supposition that there are two separate aspects in a human – one relative to other animals, another relative to god, or at least capable of taking the viewpoint of an outsider to express “legislative will”\textsuperscript{62} – it should be an empirically plausible supposition. The question of scientific plausibility of the presuppositions of modernist humanism has been raised in many fields, including environmental ethics, although surprisingly few environmental ethicists acknowledge it. However, some do. Representatives of the critical discussion often make use of the recent empirical sciences, such as cognitive science, psychology, as well as the philosophy of mind about the interrelatedness between the operations of the will, the intellect and action.\textsuperscript{63} I argue that if epistemic and voluntary activities (voluntas and ratio) were considered not as isolated but as more interwoven, the role of the complex connections between values and facts could be better uncovered for practical normative theories. This, in fact, is one of the shared features of the critical environmental discussion. Whatever definition of moral agency is de facto adopted, it dictates in practice what is considered worth striving for in order to deserve the membership of the moral community. Therefore, identification of the conceptions of moral agency used in environmental ethics is highly elucidative for analysing both the difficulties faced by environmental ethics, and their possibilities for efficiently guiding action.

However, the dominant view after Hume has been to locate moral and factual reasoning, as well as cognitive and intentional actions, in conceptually different categories, and this forms the background for the modern type of transcendentalism in ethics: the free element in the human mind represents the core of morality and ensures our moral agency, while scepticism about the possibilities of reason to directly reach moral truths can be accepted. Intentionality refers to the autonomous ability to set ends seen as a subjective activity.\textsuperscript{64} Modern solutions, such as Kant’s, to

\textsuperscript{61} Among the popular inspiring sources are process metaphysics formulated by Alfred North Whitehead and developed by Teilhard de Chardin, and Buddhist ontology, from which also deep ecologists, such as Arne Naess, draw inspiration.

\textsuperscript{62} The modern idea of human freedom of will derives largely from William Ockham’s philosophy, in which the source of good reasons for action are in God’s legislative will. Although legislative will came to refer to human will, particularly by Kant, for Ockham it remained the Divine will. The crucial thing is that he clearly distinguished human free will from any natural necessities. Tobias Hoffmann, “Duns Scotus and William of Ockham” in The Cambridge History of Moral Philosophy (eds. Sacha Golob & Jens Timmermann, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017: 181-191), 189-90.

\textsuperscript{63} See, for example, Hyman 2015, and proposals for embodied and enactive perspectives on cognition, such as Varela, Thompson and Rosch 1991, Lakoff and Johnson 1999 and Clark 1998. For more, see chapter 3. It is worth noticing, however, that these proposals should be separated from metaphysically laden premodern conceptions. According to my hypothesis, proper critical examination of both the historical roots of divided human agency and these current aspirations to reformulate the relationship between cognitive and voluntary actions, as well as inner and outer sides of mental operations would be of great value for enhancing the ability of modern ethics to settle its sustainability deficit.

\textsuperscript{64} It is also widely held that human dignity is based on intentional agency, acting for a purpose. See, e.g., Kagan 1989.
solve the problem of combining moral activity as particular and moral truth as objective and non-contingent leans on this human autonomy. Therefore, in modern ethics moral realism is connected with autonomy, based on free will, as an ability to overcome what is natural: the moral agent finds transcendence in himself. But autonomy of reasoning and freedom of will do not just represent a person’s moral agency, but also marks human uniqueness and superiority. Therefore, I argue that it is justified to call this common modern conception of moral agency exceptionalism.

The features that make modern exceptionalism problematic are, first and foremost, two. First, the exceptionality of moral agency splits human agency into conceptually separated parts: natural agency and moral agency. According to the modern moral rationale, social and material determinants are strictly placed within instrumental premises, which should not be confused with moral reasoning. Moral reasoning must be universalised and impartial. As moral agents, human beings are thus free from both sociocultural and biological-emotional bonds. This implies that they should be able to isolate their moral agency from other aspects of being human. This provides equal, inherent moral agency to all humans, while natural agency is bound to contexts and its manifestations are also found in some nonhuman beings (e.g., walking, mating, predation). These two natures are linked with conceptually distinct realms: natural agency expresses contingent reality, while moral agency can provide normativity. Implications of such a split seem significant in ethics. Internal dichotomy reflects the structure and logic of modern ethics: the universality of moral reasons (reasons of true moral conducts) has its foundation in universal moral reasoning – an individual's ability and norm to cross cultural, social and material bonds – but this requires that agents consider themselves isolated from contextual contingences in order to practice moral agency. The second problematic issue is that reason and will as aspects of the exceptional moral side of an agent, are also seen as mutually separated.

Positions on the ideal manifestation of agency influence how rationality and will are defined as conditions of moral reasoning. They have changed several times in the history of Western moral philosophy, and the history of philosophy will no doubt
continue to change. As the main hypothesis of this study claims that a revised conception of agency may have significant ethical implications, I argue that it is important that in the context of modern ethics these conceptions are continuously evaluated and discussed, including in the light of empirical science. Environmental ethicists take an active part in such discussions, and in doing so environmental ethics has a choice to make. By making use of the modern type of universalism, environmental ethics adopts the logic of its framework, and accepts that impartiality achieved by isolating oneself from the contingent conditions of life is a precondition of morality. I agree with Richard Routley that conceptual revisions are required in order to link moral theories with environmental issues, but I argue that if these revisions concern the concept of agency, the implications may be radical but should not be philosophically unacceptable.

2.2.2 EXTENDING UNIQUENESS
The endeavour to override the dichotomy between human and non-human entities and justify inclusion of various others into moral discourse has been a common line of thought in environmental ethics. It has also been the most common way to categorise different environmental arguments in accordance with their view about the domain of morally relevant entities. Such categorising results in a continuum between the limited domain at the humanist end and the wide domain at the naturalist end, between which the arguments are located. The arguments for individualist animal ethics and biocentrism are located in the middle. My question, however, is that if the focus is on the conception of human agency, does the shape of the continuum of strategies for environmental ethics change. My hypothesis is that both ends – one that consciously limits the domain by setting human beings at the centre and another that extremely widens the domain by referring to the systemic nature of things – will find similarities in their criticism against the modern humanist conception and, in fact, take parallel steps away from it. Individualist normative theories for environmental ethics, for instance, rely on the modern logic of ethical theory based on the similarity argument, but both ends oppose it. If my supposition is correct, the change in focus results in a figure that curves into a horseshoe-like form rather than a straight line. Both critical ends may approach each other, while distancing themselves from extended modern humanism. Both of the agent-focused strategies poses criticism against the modern concept from different directions. At the postmodern humanism end, the ecofeminist strategy scrutinises especially the problems of the rationalist tradition and focuses on the processes of reasoning and epistemology, while at the naturalist end, the strategy drawing from the Darwinian approach focuses on the empirically plausible concept of will and intention. My first focus, however, is on the extensional strategy, which is a conventional strategy in environmental ethics because it makes non-human entities part of the same discourse that deals with social issues.

wills. For detailed historical backgrounds on medieval Thomism and late-Medieval voluntarism, see Työrinoja 1996.
Extensional arguments criticise the limited human-centred perspective of the modern approach to ethics. They thus attempt to extend the perspective by extending the domain of moral discourse to cover some entities beyond human species (either individuals, wholes or structures) to which, thus, moral status should also be addressed. This is done on the foundations of some established ethical theories. The ability of a moral theory to guide actions in relationships with non-human others is evaluated by asking whether the others deserve moral status and can thus address moral claims or responsibilities to the agent. Thus, the task for environmental ethics is to justify as a universal claim that at least some non-human partners count normatively by arguing for their moral status. Steps away from traditional anthropocentrism are considered steps to widen the sphere of inherently moral entities, first to individual animals, then to other living beings and systems (biocentrism), and further to ecosystems, species and/or other wholes including possibly also non-living entities. An objective criterion is searched for in order to judge which relationship should be considered from a moral point of view. Such a criterion is usually found with the help of analogy: morally relevant features, due to which humans deserve moral standing, are now addressed beyond the species boundary. For a justified claim to be impartial, moral consideration should be extended to, for example, nonhuman entities capable of having interests, capable of being subjects of their own life, or capable of pursuing life. Extension by analogy has, however, sometimes been used even in the case of systemic wholes, including non-living things. James Lovelock, for instance, argues for responsibilities to Gaia by describing the Earth as an intentional entity. Both consequentialist and deontological justifications for environmental ethics represent the strategy of extension by analogy.

The extensional strategy is grounded on the internal logic of the moral theory. The strategy then aspires to show that the logic of a normative theory is applicable to the extended contexts. Especially important for a successful extension is the idea of universalised justification: the utilitarian argument, for example, is extended to other sentient entities by appealing to its internal impartiality and universality. Since any partial reason to limit moral concern is invalid, moral status can only depend on a morally counting, non-trivial feature, such as the ability to suffer. Despite the

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69 As Anna Peterson puts it, in modern ethics “[n]ature appears not only separate from but radically other to us”. Peterson 2001, 45.
70 For example, Singer 1976, 1993; Regan 1983.
71 For example, Taylor 1989.
73 See e.g. Singer 1993, 56.
74 See e.g. Regan 1983, 199-200.
75 See e.g. Goodpaster 1978, 308-25.
76 Lovelock 1979. Extensional arguments for the moral standing of ecological or cosmic wholes require, however, some holistic ontological presuppositions. For examples about land ethics, see Leopold 1949 and Callicott 1999, and for deep ecology, see Næss 1973 and 1988.
78 The classical justification of animal welfare ethics is based on Jeremy Bentham’s argument for promoting maximal good regardless of the beings whose good it is. In environmental ethics Peter Singer has most famously defended this approach. Singer 1976, 152-3; 1993, 56-7. In his Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1789), chapter 18, sec.1, Bentham writes: “The day may come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withheld from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin
practical power of extensional projects, for example, to change attitudes about the
acceptable treatment of animals, from the viewpoint of complex issues, such as
ecological sustainability or climate change, extensions do not necessarily make much
difference. The strategy out of the human-centred outlook by widening the sphere of
moral standing in fact strengthens the idea of humans in the centre of the widening
circles and as the measure for the criteria of having moral status. If morality is an
issue of a human, individual deliberator, whatever criterion we use for extension, it
reflects some human features: those that make a human exceptional and a moral
agent.

Extensionalism is criticised both as being limited with regard to the natural
entities included, and as inefficient in complex, wicked problems. The main problem
for extensionalism\textsuperscript{79} is that to extend the domain of morally relevant others implies
that the fixed centre which offers the criteria to be extended is taken as granted.
Therefore, extensional strategies remain as counterparts to the exceptional view of
human agency: the idea of a moral agent refers, first and foremost, to humans, and
remains conceptually untouched. One dilemma thus is that while seeking for a
universal justification to take human-nonhuman relationships seriously, an
extensional theory sticks to the humanist preconditions of the theory it makes use of,
and to the original interpretation of which it aspires to criticise. The framework
remains unquestioned. Although arguments formulated by applying the framework
that made moral theories toothless in the first place maintain the problematic
features, critical options are at stake, too. Questions arise about connecting moral
agency to whatever exceptional feature represents humanity.\textsuperscript{80} In my view, criticism
aimed at the harmful manifestations of exceptionalism in modern ethics without
posing explicit questions about the conception of an agent remains incomplete.

\textsuperscript{79} See, Krebs 1999, 21-3.

\textsuperscript{80} Authors calling for revised environmental argumentation on the grounds of ecosystem ecology
are most often suspicious about exceptional human freedom and rationality. However, the focus of
criticism is often that such an understanding alienates us from the rest of nature and makes non-human
objects of action morally irrelevant. The influence of ecological understanding for the conception of
moral deliberation and agency is present in writings by, for example, Holmes Rolston III, J. Baird
Callicott, and Arne Naess. Rolston, for instance, highlights value as a relational phenomenon generated
in dynamic ecological interaction. See Rolston 1988, 114-5. An early ecohumanist analysis about the
weakness of the traditional humanist notion of moral agency is Andrew Brennan’s Thinking about
Nature (1988). He aims beyond traditional humanism. He shares the deep ecologists’ criticism against
modernism, but the critic is targeted against the narrow concept of both nature and the human rather
than their anthropocentrism. He even admits – as an ecohumanist – that factual and evaluative facts are
interrelated, although no factual state of affairs can justify any certain moral claim: moral codes are so
tied with concepts and views concerning the nature of human and nonhuman reality that prescriptions
in moral deliberation are inseparable from such views – which must, therefore, be submitted to science.

According to Brennan, freedom, autonomy and rationality in the sense required by modern moral
theories are practically never manifested. Brennan 1988, 27, 65, 135-6, 143-4, 199-200, 211, 221. I count
Brennan among the weak voices towards an alternative location for the meaning of the natural sciences
in environmental ethics, compared to either modern or deep ecological views. For a parallel criticism by
ecofeminists, see Warren & Cheney 1991.
Conceptual criticism against the modern framework caused wide interest in alternative philosophical frameworks and vivid ontological discussion among environmental ethicists especially from the 1970s to the 90s. Deep ecologists and moral holists, for instance, called for a paradigm shift.\footnote{Discussion contrasting anthropocentric ethics and a distinctive field of environmental ethics capable of making environmental issues of primary interest was vivid especially after the provocative writings during the 1960s and 70s. Among them were Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), Australian philosopher Richard Routley’s “Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?” (1973) and Norwegian ecophilosopher Arne Næss’s “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-ranged Ecology Movement: A Summary” (1973). Routley argues that nonhuman nature should be regarded as morally counting without referring to relationships between humans or to human interests. Routley (Sylvan) 2003, 49-50. John Passmore (1974) is among those critics who have argued that the anthropocentric value of nature is, when understood properly, able to justify claims for environmentally sustainable actions. Radical ecocentric philosophies mainly defended ontologically alternative approaches to nature, among which process philosophy based on the philosophies of Alfred North Whitehead and Teilhard de Chardin remain among the most popular ones. Radical views were empowered by increasing scientific understanding of harmful human impacts on nature and predictions based on them by the Club of Rome (Donella Meadows, Dennis Meadows, Jørgen Randers and William Beherens III, *The Limits to Growth: A Report to The Club of Rome’s Project on the Predicament of Mankind*, Universal Books, 1972).} The reasons for omitting them from this study are twofold. First, the solution they offer usually rests on an ontological shift.\footnote{In spite of coupling ecological and moral holism here, it is worth noting that these theoretically different approaches should not be confused. Examples of ecological holism are metaphysical approaches, such as the Gaia theory developed by James Lovelock, and Arne Næss’s ecosophy, while moral holism is an ethical view that opposes individualism and prioritises the good of the whole (e.g. species and ecosystems), exemplified, for example, in J. Baird Callicott’s writings in defence of Aldo Leopold’s land ethics. See, Lovelock 1979, Næss 1973, Callicott 1999.} Despite the fact that such a shift can offer an attractive sensitivity with respect to ecological interactivities, the assumption that a metaphysical paradigm shift would automatically have positive moral implications is, however, problematic. Metaphysically laden arguments may also be inefficient in practice: ontological revisions are not easily accepted or motivated. The weakness is that any metaphysical project excludes those who do not accept the premises of the discussion. Despite being speculatively fascinating, it thus fails in producing solutions to the current sustainability crisis of ethics, which should be evaluated, in my understanding, with regard to environmental sustainability. Due to the need for political efficiency, mainstream environmental ethics has also remained over the years on familiar, politically sound foundations,\footnote{For a couple of examples, Paul Taylor, Peter Singer and Tom Regan. See Taylor 1989; Singer 1991; Regan 1983.} or has taken a pragmatist approach.\footnote{For example, Anrew Ligh, Bryan Norton and Anthony Weston. See Light 1996; Norton 1987; 2005; Weston 2004; 2009.} Second, holist and deep ecological arguments are philosophical rather than ethical in structure. Therefore, they do not ethically form any one category, but can be part of some other categories. For example, some of these arguments represent a further type of extensional strategy, although they do not take the moral self for granted, and as such a type of exceptional moral agent. However, by calling for an ecologically revised idea of moral self, a notable deep ecologist Arne Næss argues for the self that covers – as a self – all the ecological relationships to an ecological whole. Roughly put, this means that the moral self is extended to cover all others, which then become parts of the self. According to critics, this kind of strategy is reminiscent of ethical egoism.\footnote{Næss 1988. For criticism, see Plumwood 1994, 156-7.}
The strategy of extended exceptionality in environmental ethics applies modern moral theories to extend the sphere of moral objects on the basis of the very logic of moral justification included in the extended theory. For example, utilitarianists, such as Peter Singer, use needs or preferences, while deontologists, such as Tom Regan, use rights as the tool of extension. By focusing on the possibilities of a theory to include nonhuman others into the moral community, use is made of the internal logic of the original theory: like theories of universal justification, modern moral theories are potentially extendable. However, the extended theory also adopts the included conception of human agency. The most used theories in extensional environmental ethics represent utilitarianism (focusing largely on value theory),86 and deontological ethics (focusing on the rights or duties to respect),87 but also others, such as contractarian ethics.88 The domain of the moral sphere can also be extended for philosophical or theological reasons, as has been done, for instance, in deep ecology89 and Gaia theory,90 but agent-based moral theories, such as environmental virtue ethics, do not similarly aspire to include natural others. A dilemma for environmental ethics is that while seeking for universal justification to take environmental relations seriously, it often sticks to the conceptual presuppositions it opposed in the first place.

I argue that six critical notions, at least, can be made about constructing a strategy for environmental ethics by extending the logic of modern moral theories to justify the moral status of nonhuman others without conceptual criticism about the included conception of a moral agent. I shall now use these notions as the structure to introduce the influences of applying the exceptionality of being a moral subject to the strategies of environmental ethics. They concern (1) morally counting relationships defined by referring only to the facts about the object, regardless of the agent-derived facts, (2) the criterion of moral relevance derived from the idea of similarity (with the subject), which reduces moral relevance to human beings who are unquestioned members of the moral community, (3) the implied (anthro)centric structure of ethics, which makes it conceptually exclusive and open for criticism about moral imperialism, (4) the provided structure of justification based on the idea of a morally demanding analogy between the agent and the object, on which universal arguments about respect or equal consideration can be constructed, but fails to deal with strangeness and partiality, (5) implausible presuppositions concerning the agent’s freedom and impartiality implicit in the extended theories, and (6) the instrumental role of factual reasoning and knowledge, which implies a trust in the neutrality of science and epistemic optimism, and in fact subordinates the practical outcomes of moral reasoning to science.

Extensional arguments rest on the idea of universalised ethics,91 and the principle of equal consideration is the most used foundation for extension. Extension is

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88 E.g. Rowlands 2002.
89 For an extensional strategy through extending the moral self to cover everything in deep ecology, see Næss 1973, 1988.
90 For extension through extending the Earth to cover agency, see Lovelock 1979.
91 In modern ethics the principle of formal impartiality is considered to be a condition for a coherent moral theory. According to the universalizability axiom formulated by Harry J. Gensler, the moral
grounded on the legacy of the extended theory by appealing to impartiality. Since impartiality is seen as the best expression of reasonably justified ethics, extension by appealing to impartiality is normatively motivating. However, obligations, rights or principles regulating relationships in human moral community can be extended only if there is some universal condition, due to which every entity that meets this condition, deserves moral consideration. The focus of the extensional strategy is, thus, on the object. Kenneth Goodpaster defines the general structure of a moral relationship by the formula: “For all A, X deserves moral consideration from A.” Since both A (rational moral agents) and “consideration” (the basic forms of practical respect) are already defined, the only open term is X.

The question for environmental ethics arguing for moral consideration of nonhuman nature can, thus, be reduced to the question about the kinds of beings to which the category of X impartially refers. According to Goodpaster, all beings verified to meet the criterion (if we find the objectively right criterion) have moral standing and mandate practical respect from humans: environmental ethics just needs to point out those who fulfil the requirements. In spite of differences, arguments representing an extensional strategy in general rest on the originally Kantian idea of moral status as something inherent in the object, independent from its relationship with the agent or particular contextual issues. The criterion for moral consideration should be objectively and impartially applied to each object that deserves it. Intrinsic features that qualify the object are conceptually connected to selected theory and simplified to make different entities commensurable. A being either meets or does not meet with the criteria, and if the being does match the criteria, it deserves moral status universally and independently from the agent. Definition of the borders of the moral domain is clinching.

Extension can be justified only if different cases are identified as relatively similar and comparable. The criteria for extending moral consideration adhere to the idea of a moral community in which all members share a common feature by which they


92 For example, Peter Singer and Kenneth Goodpaster argue that since moral judgements must be universalizable, moral principles should always be applied when possible: the interests, needs and desires of all must be counted. Singer 1995, 174; Singer 1976, 100-01; Goodpaster 1978, 308-9. Singer refers especially to R. M. Hare's impartiality thesis, according to which thinking ethically requires imagining oneself "in the situation of all those affected by" the action. See Hare's Freedom and Reason (Oxford University Press 1965) and Moral Thinking (Oxford University Press 1981).

93 Extensional strategy thus uses the kind of justification that assumes an essentialist, universal qualification for morally countable beings, one that mandates entities for moral respect, and that this qualification can be verified. Therefore, somewhat similar critical questions arise in the case of extensional arguments that arise in modernist anthropocentrism. One could also ask what kind of ethos does it exemplify that the self-understanding of environmental ethics includes an aim to seek for the qualified members of "our club" in order to save their rights against non-members? It seems that much of the environmentalists' criticism against modernist anthropocentrism is also valid for extensionalism. The basis here lies in Kant's view of the moral community. See, Callanan 2013, 57-8.

94 Goodpaster 1978.

95 The condition for a morally relevant relationship is located in the quality of the other. It is easy to see the ambiguity of the borderline between morally relevant and other beings; the factual categories may intersect (pets and chimpanzees, for example, are often treated like babies).

96 The normative implication is thus clear: all who meet it, mandate respect. Birch 1993, 313-4.

deserve moral consideration. In order to be recognised as a member that may set claims for the agent, a moral patient thus needs to share a morally significant similarity with the agent. For Kant this is first and foremost rationality. However, Kant leaves the door open for some nonhuman primates to enter into the moral community, if they only qualify for the intrinsic value-conferring property, namely morally significant similarity. Extensional strategies redefine this criterion on the basis that makes humans and some nonhuman entities equal as moral patients. In this logic it seems necessary that features providing moral status should be seen as isolated from any particular features. This implies not only that the inherent features providing moral status are independent from any agent-derived features, but also vice versa, that the core element of the agency stands untouched by contingent relationships.

Duties can be extended to treatment of nonhuman beings either by analogy or by ontology, but arguments that wish to avoid metaphysical suppositions usually represent extension by analogy. While ontological extensions regard all morally relevant beings as belonging to the category of beings that share ontological similarity –intrinsic value, for instance – extension by analogy regards morally relevant kindness as an analogical similarity: different beings deserve equal consideration by their analogies in morally significant properties. It is central for an analogical argument that the criterion for moral status is impartial and independent from morally trivial categories and factual differences. However, by claiming that different beings share features that count as morally relevant similarities, the argument in fact insists that the criterion is isolatable from the other features of the object. Since the decisive elements for a relationship between an agent and an object to count morally thus are the qualities of the object and the criteria for having moral status, the source of the criteria remains untouched. The criteria is derived from what is understood in the original theory to be exceptional in the moral realm compared to the contingent world – which is defined as the feature of human agency. Exceptional moral agency, thus, emphasises here the irrelevance of material, social, ecological and evolutionary contingences; they are insignificant for moral rationality and the way morality is conceptualised. The agent practising moral rationality is “plain”, without particular features or relationships: only limited features participate

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98 Moral patients are not just objects in the sense that the agents have moral duties concerning them, but they should also be called moral subjects, as they become subject members of an extended moral community to whom the agents can have duties although they are not themselves moral agents.

99 For criticism of this kind of Kantian extensionalism, see, for example, Callicott 2002.

100 It is considered to offer widely acceptable grounds for environmental ethics, since it does not rest on any speculative metaphysical system that should be first adopted.

101 Morally relevant similarities are not factual, but with morally counting issues, such as having interests, these similarities are not reducible to empirical features, such as sentience.

102 For instance, *sentience*, which is the condition for having interests in Singer’s theory, does not count morally as such, since only the consequences of actual interests count. Despite being philosophically clear, one problem in separating the conceptually counting features from the factual ones is that the quality and amount of the performed interests (in Singer’s case) in fact depend on the factual type of senses of the entity, and the senses can be influenced and even manipulated from outside, intentionally or non-intentionally. But, according to Singer’s consequentialism, since an interest exists, it deserves moral consideration for conceptual reasons; and the more an entity has interests, the more moral attention it deserves. From the viewpoint of some agent, then, it could be motivated to maximise the amount of one’s own interest and try to influence others in a way that minimises their actualised interests.
in the deliberation while most features remain passive. Particularities or the relationship with the object do not play a role.

In a consequentialist interpretation, for example, the underlying principle on which extension relies is that of equal consideration of interests. Peter Singer’s strategy is to extend the utilitarian moral argument to everyone whose interests could be hurt, i.e. all sentient beings capable of suffering. In spite of being a necessary condition for having interests, sentience is not, however, a sufficient condition for moral status rather than interests. Interests are not reducible to any particular experience of pleasure or pain, but are independent from their necessary bases, the ability to suffer and enjoy. Since the thing that matters for an agent is the consequences of his or her actions from the point of view of the actual interests of sentient patients, it is required that the patient should be free enough to have an interest. Three problems arise: (a) the moral domain is fairly limited, because only “free”, to some extent, entities can have interests, (b) among sentient beings those who have more interests deserve more attention, since each interest deserves equal respect, and (c) as the feature that guarantees moral status does not depict factual similarity, the agent’s possibility to achieve information about the good he or she should promote, namely interests, is very limited. Despite the successful applications in animal ethics, I argue that Singer’s original theory does not succeed very well in constructing an impartial, non-anthropocentric environmental moral theory. The key problem, in my view, is in the conception of the human agent, which isolates cognitive deliberation and the non-cognitive source of interests on the one hand, and abstract, isolated moral agency and partial, contextual human nature on the other. Such a split seems scientifically implausible and philosophically harmful.

Kenneth Goodpaster criticises sentience as the manifestation of the interest criterion, since it is biologically reducible to just some means for survival and instead prefers “being alive” as a more valid gatekeeper. Being alive could also hold for a wider sphere of objects, covering non-sentient animals and plants: the need for light and water are the interests of plants, although they do not feel pain when not given them. Goodpaster’s version of extended utilitarianism criticises Singer precisely

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104 Singer 1993, 57, 77; Singer 1999, 328. Singer’s conception of interests can be considered in terms of dispositions, which clarifies that they are neither clearly phenomenal nor realist. For his naturalist view of “real interests”, see Singer 1995, 194-233; Singer 1993, 331-2. See also Crisp 1999, 86-7.
105 Having interests is possible only through the ability to override nature by wanting something: an entity needs to step out of the situation and experience it as pain or pleasure. Among interests, physical reactions are weaker, while freely chosen desires are stronger interests. Singer 1976, 159, Singer 1993, 14.
106 Because Singer’s animal ethics most prominently represents an example of extensional strategy, it is worth, I think, mentioning these problems.
107 See Singer 1976, 149; Singer 1993, 21-3. Singer’s argument represents an anti-egalitarian mode of the principle of equal consideration: the moral status of an entity is relative to it having qualities relevant for interests. For instance, a mouse does not have a similar attitude to life, memories and fears as humans, therefore, its interest in life does not amount to an equal moral status with the respect to life as is the case with humans.
about the issue that utilitarians wish to avoid by appeal to impartiality: connecting moral status to irrelevant descriptive features.\(^{110}\)

Instead of arguing that sentience is an ontologically or morally justificatory ground, however, Singer appeals to the analogical similarity between the sentience of an agent and that of other creatures as decisive for the obligations this relationship addresses to the agent. By analogy, the agent can identify with the feelings of an animal: he can, although weakly, understand its suffering.\(^{111}\) This refers again to another difficulty that is linked with the adopted view of the agent: the extended theory implies trust in factual reasoning about the potential objects of moral respect: the agent should achieve information not only about the other’s expressed experience, but also their interests, which are not reducible to these experiences. A somewhat similar problem is included in the argument for rights-based extension on the side of deontological theories defended by Tom Regan. He argues that the right to be respected and treated well is justified for all that have inherent value. Having inherent value depends on whether the entity can be seen as a “subject-of-a-life”, which is Regan’s criterion for any morally considerable being. But a practical problem concerns the possibility and authority to define from the point of view of an entity and decide whether it is a subject-of-a-life or not.\(^{112}\)

Analogy as an abstract similarity entails two types of difficulties for the arguments: first, they subscribe to a modernist neglect of the body and the physical structures as morally relevant (both for the agent and the object), and second, they admit the problem of strangeness: a human moral agent can never fully understand what counts as the good for the non-human other.\(^{113}\) The obligation to recognise a particular relationship as morally counting depends on what kind of internal features the agent recognises as inherent in the object. The argument defended by Paul Taylor, for example, claims that having a good of its own as an abstract similarity provides a being both necessary and sufficient reason to be appointed inherent worth and to be respected accordingly. However, having a good of its own does not straightforwardly oblige agents,\(^{114}\) but rather, if the moral agents see other living organisms analogically as bearers of inherent worth by virtue of them being teleological centres of life (having a good of their own), they can extend the idea of moral community to cover them, too. Taylor insists that we recognise this analogy if we only give up our narrowly human belief-systems and adopt a bio-centric outlook that depicts all living organisms as teleological centres of life, and thus, as entities having a good of their

\(^{110}\) The debate between Singer and Goodpaster uncovers that it may be suspicious to hold interests as a pure moral concept, as Singer and other consequentialists would wish.


\(^{112}\) Regan 1983.

\(^{113}\) Analogical goods for and duties to are derived from the goods for and duties to those whose moral status is most rarely challenged – normal, healthy (Western) adults.

\(^{114}\) In a human moral community, obligations are grounded in the idea that all persons are bearers of inherent worth by virtue of their being persons, and therefore, this obligation cannot be straightforwardly extended to animals.
own. When recognised, the analogy obligates moral agents to follow the ultimate moral attitude in relationships with these entities.

Individualist extensional arguments, especially, highlight the ability of an agent to rationally evaluate the moral relevance of nonhuman others and take the correct attitude towards them. But since interests, rights or values of the entities are not quite reducible to empirical facts about their condition features, it is important that the agents have empathy with the interests of the sentient others, adopt the correct (biocentric) outlook, or have the right attitude of admiring respect to the inherent value in all subjects-of-life. All this is possible because of the analogy between animal (or other) and human capacities in these respects. Singer, for instance, makes an epistemic supposition that an agent can and does recognise what is in the interests of the animals that are sentient, like the agent himself. This represents epistemic optimism. But there is a certain asymmetry in the empathy and rational recognition of animals by agents that may provide a problem of foreign extraction, or even an “imperialistic” relationship. Together with the required impartiality this implies (a) the divided identity of a human agent and (b) extended but human-centred value and moral status.

The role and influence of the nonhuman world for the moral agent raises at least two questions. First, as an agent’s environmental relationships are contingent, they are seen as insignificant for an agent’s moral reasoning in the context of modern ethics. This is philosophically a clear claim but as a description of a human being, a member of the mammal species, rather than a non-natural entity, it may be scientifically implausible. Second, moral reasoning conceptually separates voluntary action as the source of values and instrumental reason that points out the means. This means that the view of moral agency is internally split into mutually isolated will and reason. From a human perspective, will is isolated from the contingencies of the world, and thus, is not totally natural, while cognitive abilities may be seen as particular capabilities dependent on, say, genes and education. This split implies that the spheres are conceptually monolithic in the sense that reason, at least, does not have a significant influence on the ability of the will, which is thus free.

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115 According to Taylor, we need to acknowledge other beings as similar to ourselves, but that similarity cannot be verified or unverified by science, rather it is a question of outlook. Taylor 1989, 42, 72, 76-79, 101, 119, 168.
116 According to Taylor, respect for nature is the ultimate moral attitude. Taylor 1989, 80.
120 Singer’s optimism concerning the agent’s ability to interpret the interests of a sentient being is based partly on the similarities between animal and human nervous systems. Singer 1991, 11-16; Singer 1993, 69-70. For Singer’s empiricism, see Crisp 1999, 94-5.
121 In the case of Singer, at least, it seems that the aspiration to avoid naturalism implies on the part of the agent reason derived objective knowledge, which guides moral action, while on the part of the object, moral status is deserved on the basis of subjective experiences of gain and loss.
122 A dichotomised conception of a human agent implies that philosophically one needs to select between reason and will as the primary source of moral reasons. In consequence, discussions on metaethics also remain dichotomised. For example, metaethical theories about the source of moral reasons representing “rationalism” and “emotivism” are seen as opposed.
2.2.3 A DILEMMA THAT REMAINS

Extensional arguments are conceptually exclusive and centric models: extensions are based on some relevant similarity with a certain centre, to which all moral relevance is reducible. The criterion for moral standing thus conceptually depends on the conception of the centre, namely human moral agency. Human exceptionalism, as a part of an extensional strategy, as well as traditional humanism, can be criticised for (human-derived) exclusivism.\textsuperscript{123} Despite the fact that the emphasis is on inclusive equality, the requirement for similarity between relevant moral parties implies that differences betoken exclusion. Extensional arguments implicitly strengthen the view that moral agents who best can meet the criteria, stand at the centre, this means in practice that an adult human (perhaps a white wealthy man) represents the norm and qualifies the measure. Around him there are others who may, to some extent, meet the same criteria. The feature that guarantees the exceptional moral agency for a human remains marking the border of moral domain in some modest form. The functionality and practical efficiency of modern moral theories – in cases of obligations between people as well as possible obligations towards nonhumans – rely thus to some extent on the reliability of the adopted view of moral agency, which is, if the modernist conception is adopted, demanding: moral agency requires isolatedness, freedom, autonomy, impartiality and rationality. If these features are considered to be conceptual preconditions for morality, they should be unchangeable and as eternal as morality itself.

According to many geologists, the geological epoch starting from the rise of the Industrial Revolution should be named the Anthropocene\textsuperscript{124} due to the influence of human activities that have profoundly altered the conditions and processes on planet earth in an ultimate and irreversible way. Geologically they include significant changes in erosion and sediment transport (caused by colonisation, agriculture, climate change and urbanisation), chemical composition of the atmosphere, soils and oceans, perturbation in the cycles of carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus and metals – and derived changes in environmental conditions (including global warming, ocean acidification and other changes in the oceans) – as well as changes in the biosphere on both land and sea, (due to habitat loss, predation, species invasions and human-caused physical and chemical changes), among them an irreversible species mass extinction. The idea of the Anthropocene as an empirical fact about the human influence on the conditions of its own life and existence – in the condition in which human agents identify themselves, socialise, feel, reason, deliberate about good and right, decide, become motivated, and act – calls into question the triviality of the contingent conditions for human agency. It also challenges the common conceptual division between moral and non-moral actions, since it is not possible for me, in practice, to be conscious of my motives or rational with my actions: I never know whether the action I am performing counts in the category of moral actions. This calls

\textsuperscript{123} Criticism that is targeted against racism, sexism and cultural imperialism by, for example, feminist ethics, can also be seen to take effect in the case of extensional arguments.

\textsuperscript{124} The term was announced in P. J. Crutzen & E. F. Stoermer, “The ‘Anthropocene’, in Global Change Newsletter 41 (2000): 17–18. Geologists have formally worked from 2008 on to define the Anthropocene as the new geological epoch. The term is widely used, although it has not been officially accepted.
into question the demand for isolated moral rationality and invites us to consider whether the moral relevance of indirect actions through the actual conditions of morality and the construction of agency can be recognised.

However, anthropology has been a somewhat guarded topic in modern ethics, perhaps because the critical alternatives to the modern idea of autonomy are seen to imply ethical reductionism. But the environmental dilemma forces moral discourse to scrutinise the implications of modern humanist suppositions for moral reasoning, but also for the self-understanding of ethics in general. Environmental ethics that subscribes to modernist presumptions shares the view that a moral perspective entails the exceptionality of moral agency, manifested in independence and impartiality. By that, however, an environmental strategy in fact strengthens conceptual anthropocentrism, in which the ability to detach oneself from nature and from social others is at the core of being moral, and is hence a norm. At the same time, environmentalists widely acknowledge that the idea of human uniqueness has become suspicious in the light of scientific evidences. Therefore, sticking moral agency to such features represent implicit essentialism. Those who criticise human exceptionality focus on naturally or socially reductive anthropology, but often it also implies the reduction of moral concepts to natural or cultural phenomena, especially in non-environmentalist contexts. This is not, however, the only direction for valid criticism. On the contrary, it seems that more sophisticated criticisms can be put forward if the target is correctly specified. Rejecting isolated autonomy and absolute freedom as preconditions does not necessarily imply determinism about human agency, let alone reductionism concerning moral reasons. A relational view, for example, that connects the mechanisms of an agent to their social and ecological contexts does not deny the unique complexity of agency itself.

Among environmental philosophers, critical voices have been fairly active against humanist and individualist overtones and their ethical implications in the extensional strategy. For example, both individualistic and holistic versions of extensionalism indicate moral monism. Debate over monism and pluralism was animated especially during the 1990s. Among the prominent partners in the debate were J. Baird Callicott as the most notable defender of monism, and Eugene Hargrove (see Hargrove 1989), Anthony Weston, Bryan Norton (see Norton 1996), Andrew Light and Gary Varner representing pluralist and critical views. According to Varner, for example, a holistic environmental approach needs to be pluralist, because ecosystems have no welfare of their own. If we argue for a direct moral consideration of structures, the reasons that can be given for, say, the moral relevance of ecosystems should be very different from the reason given for individuals.

125 Here I refer especially to the natural sciences. For more, see section 2.3 and chapter 3. But a similar question should also be raised on the grounds of the social sciences and philosophical anthropology. For this discussion, see section 2.4 and chapter 4.

126 The active role of the environmental context in the agent’s moral reasoning can be proved without specific metaphysical presuppositions, just by showing how human operations work. For more, see chapters 3-5. For the topic defended in environmental ethics, see e.g. Cheney 1998, 265; Preston 2000, 240; Raz & Wallace 2003; and Plumwood 2002, 49, 54, 56, 206, 215-216, 227-29. The discussion is connected with the claim by ecofeminists and other feminist epistemologies, when they argue, contrary to Platonist rationalism, that the conception of knowledge as a product of reason should be compensated by a wider conception that takes into account the operations of the senses and the body in knowledge production. See Plumwood 2002, 46. The attempt of many feminist epistemologists to walk a tightrope between postmodern and hegemonic epistemologies concerning the object’s activity can be exemplified by Donna Haraway’s words about the object of knowledge. It should be seen “as an actor and agent […] never as a slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and authorship of knowledge”. Haraway 1988, 592.

127 Debate over monism and pluralism was animated especially during the 1990s. Among the prominent partners in the debate were J. Baird Callicott as the most notable defender of monism, and Eugene Hargrove (see Hargrove 1989), Anthony Weston, Bryan Norton (see Norton 1996), Andrew Light and Gary Varner representing pluralist and critical views. According to Varner, for example, a holistic environmental approach needs to be pluralist, because ecosystems have no welfare of their own. If we argue for a direct moral consideration of structures, the reasons that can be given for, say, the moral relevance of ecosystems should be very different from the reason given for individuals’
standing to a single centre. This monocentric view of ethics has been criticised most prominently by Anthony Weston. Weston argues that the strategy fails, because it simply replaces anthropocentrism by a wider centrism, and instead supports the call for conceptual analysis. His proposal is that an environmental strategy strives to decentre moral approaches to environmental issues in order to take the multiplicity and complexity of the natural world seriously. Like some other critics, Weston takes the theologian Martin Buber to be the first to formulate a truly respectful relationship between different kinds of beings, and calls for a paradigm shift to consider moral worth with diverse centres. Multicentrism, as he calls it, starts with decentring humanness and disentangling worth from any one qualification. In ethics this implies that we should not talk about abstract respect rather than a “willingness and ability to make the space, not just conceptually, but in one’s own person and in the design and structure of personal and human spaces, for the emergence of more-than-human others into relationship”. One challenge for this kind of thinking is, however, that the ethical realm in a decentred world is not something that is reached by reason, nor should it be considered in a relativist way and lacking foundations in the real world.

The sphere of morality and its limits, thus, depends conceptually on the conception of human moral agency. Therefore, I argue, the most critical points of extensional strategy for environmental ethics are included in the implied conception of the human agent. Despite the fact that the problems of extensional arguments would otherwise be solved, an applied concept of agency can still maintain the environmentally inefficient structures of moral theories. The concepts of freedom and knowledge that dominate in the modern view of human agency depict human supremacy and the authority to decide about the future of the earth. The seeds of such an authority are included in the modern presumptions of human agency. This is, according to my understanding, precisely why the modern type of humanism and human-centredness has been so strongly criticised in environmental discussions about weakening the capacity of ethics to deal with the relationship between humans and the material world in the first place. To be sure, the problem for environmental ethics is not anthropocentrism as such, I argue, but the modernist presuppositions to which it is connected. If extensions of these preconceptions to arguments for

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128 Weston 2004, 29. See also Uma Narayan & Sandra Harding (eds.), Decentering the Center (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.)
131 Weston 2004, 31. A decentred world refers to the multiplicity of centres and the plurality of values in the world rather than to anacentred, or relativist world.
133 Cuomo 1998, 95–7; Plumwood 1993, 22.
134 Alternative anthropocentric approaches have been offered especially by environmental virtue ethicists and ecofeminists. See also Andrew Brennan’s seminal work Thinking About Nature for what
environmental sustainability without critically evaluating them are the only forms for environmental ethics to contribute to the political discussion, the results remain quite insignificant in many cases.

The criticism in environmental philosophy against the conceptual dichotomy between a human agent and other beings is targeted to appointing qualifications of morally relevant others to features derived from the quality of humans as moral persons. However, the role of these others, as well as the nature of a human person, in the drama of life remains invisible in moral theories. This notably restricts the ability of a theory to take all the perspectives of complex environmental problems into account. I shall go a little further and argue that the most decisive features of a human agent, whose scrutiny could help here, are freedom of will and cognitive reasoning. As will be shown, the common conceptions of them adopted to the mainstream modernist paradigm are currently under wide critical scientific discussion. Despite the categorical difference between ethical and empirical discourses, the properties of agency should be open to debate in the light of the most recent understandings of the human mind, rationality and the nature of intentionality. This is especially important because of the status given to the core features of human agency in moral discourse: they represent the ideal to be realised for a moral agent. If the evidence that will be given in the following chapters is correct, the features praised as marks of the core of moral standing need some revision. By leaving exception human agency unquestioned, the extensional strategy for environmental ethics consolidates structures that are inefficient from the sustainability perspective.

Specific attention should be paid to the conditions and mechanisms of moral action, especially the processes of voluntary actions and knowledge formation. Instead of just repeating the modern story of the Kantian philosophy that “free choice entails a form of metaphysical ‘subject’ or ‘agent’ by way of the ‘Will,’” which is a distinctive “faculty” of the mind, the focus should be on the conditions and mechanisms that produce intentional action. If acting for moral reasons is thought to require genuine impartiality from the agent, the agent needs to identify himself in isolation from his social and environmental surroundings in order to apply moral principles in the correct way. Moral agency is usually considered to require radical freedom, while autonomy as a parent, lover, or economic agent may admittedly be more partial and contextual, but comparison of these two could help in a more plausible formulation of moral agency. Freedom of will and intentional valuation is emphasised especially in non-naturalist ethics: an agent as an autonomous subject guarantees the non-natural character of moral values. This implies, however, separation between two realms of the human subject. Naturalists, for their part, struggle between empiricism and essentialism. According to a widely shared modern view, moral agency should be somehow released from natural causalities in order to

can be called eco-humanism. Brennan 1988. Anthropocentrism can also be conceptually differentiated from human-centredness, which is philosophically bound to conceptual frameworks that concentrate on human issues.

135 For an interesting approach to environmental ethics by using the image of drama, see Dean-Drummond 2009 and 2014.
136 Solomon 2003, 204.
be capable of taking an impartial “third person’s point of view”, while natural agency remains under natural causalities.\footnote{Kant, for example, thinks that the division between what “is” and what “ought to be” refers to the dichotomy between determinism and freedom. See Kant 1990, 13-4 and Kant 1987, 35.}

To clarify the dilemma, it is helpful with regard to this question to remind ourselves of the crossroads at which modern ethics originated. The debate culminated between Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus in the 13th century about the mutual influences between intellect and will, and the role of each in moral reasoning. As was mentioned earlier, Thomas argued that virtuousness of will can enhance intellect to better reach the moral facts, the best understanding of which is accepted by the will. Intellect can be either cultivated or corrupted by (the vices and virtues of) will. If the outcomes of intellectual operations fail, they may misguide the will. According to Scotus, the will is free from the guidance of intellect, and intellect can correctly serve bad will without being corrupted. This implies that reason is instrumental, which is, again, a distinctive feature of the modern view: outcomes of intellectual operations are neutral with regard to voluntary actions. Intellectual operations as separated from attitudes and voluntary orientation emphasise the objectivity and neutrality of the information they give; the autonomy of science becomes highlighted. Critical evaluation of scientific paradigms, constructed epistemic categories, or other conditions of normative commitments is not a moral activity of any kind. This can be seen as problematic from the environmental point of view. Questions about how the objects and facts of the world are conceptualised or constructed, or how cognitive relationships, like the recognition of objects, modifies our intentions and will, for example, are beyond moral discourse and evaluation.

In the history of moral philosophy, a move towards voluntarism was important for the autonomy of ethics: moral actions are clearly not bound to a better or worse understanding of facts, but on the contrary, moral crimes can be committed by the well informed. However, there are significant side effects to this line of thought. According to critics, both the freedom of voluntary actions and the neutrality of intellectual capacities play a bigger role in modern ethics than seems plausible. I agree and argue that in the context of environmental ethics, at least, the implications include normative inefficiency with regard to complex issues about the conditions of life. After the victory of via moderna in the Medieval debate, several other philosophical and cultural traits of thought, such as humanism, together with scientific development, increasing technical skills, political situations and economic conditions made conceptual changes acceptable and dominant, allowing the notion that a human can represent ideal moral agency without caring for the factual ecological state of affairs.\footnote{Influential in the historical formation of the conceptual self-understanding of ethics with regard to non-human nature were especially Renaissance humanism (see section 2.1), Cartesian philosophy of mind (see section 3.2.3), and Francis Bacon’s philosophy of science (see, e.g. Preston 2003).} It slowly emerged to the common understanding in Western societies that the relationship between human moral agents and their own future is possible without moral restraint. Science promoted the notion of humans constructing a better world for themselves, leading to the expansion and
differentiation of civilizations.139 The important thing in this cultural change, a change
that recent environmentalists have called a conceptual mistake that encouraged hubris concerning the contingent natural and social conditions of our moral agency,
was that the new science considered the human mind as an exceptional knot of
causalities and finalities.140 Over the centuries, a common understanding came to
hold that humans as moral agents represented a unique point in the universe and that
the causalities of the world could be enslaved by an autonomous individual.

The modern concept of freedom has recently been heavily criticised by
philosophical anthropologists.141 According to Robert Solomon, for example, free
action can be seen to be connected with “the rest of a person’s character,
circumstances, and culture, including his or her reflections on these”. He argues that
freedom and responsibility should be evaluated in relation to the narrative of one’s
life: an act that “fits and makes sense in one’s life story” is free enough to be called
freely chosen.142 From the viewpoint of this study the question concerns what might
be the implications of such a modest or narrative approach to the concept of agency
– and to a self-understanding of ethics, through that. If the concept of agency is not
restricted to the limited realm of the will, it is possible to think that choosing one’s
values, for instance, is deeply tied with non-conscious and quasi-intentional aspects
in the agent’s processes, but can, nevertheless, be called freely chosen if it is
narratively justified.143

On the practical level, at least, Solomon’s modest view of freedom represents
a huge step from the Enlightenment tradition: the absolute autonomy of free will is not
among the prerequisites of moral responsibility. The narrative relationships between
will and the other aspects of agency are complex; talking about will as an isolated
mental operation is, thus, misleading. I agree with the critics. Supposing that the
agent’s relationships with her home landscapes, pets or surrounding climate do not

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139 Bacon acknowledged the power of science and argued, therefore, that science should not be
separated from moral evaluation. The worry for him was that people misuse the power of science
(recognition of which apparently awed him) and use it for morally wrong purposes. See Preface in Inst.
in Klein 2016. But as a philosopher of the modern project he denied that the constructed new worlds and
civilisations, knowledge, language or material conditions could have any impact on the will, or the quality
of value premises of the moral argument.

140 The range of science and technology in their ethical meaning transcends the realm of the
application of tools and/or instruments, in so far as the aim is the transformation of whole systems. Since
causality and finality can interact on the basis of human will and knowledge, a plurality of worlds
506–7, cited in Klein 2016. Therefore, Bacon emphasized that future civilizations must cultivate high
moral standards. Bacon’s Nova Atlantis “concerns a utopian society that is carefully organized for the
purposes of scientific research and virtuous living” P. Urbach, Francis Bacon’s Philosophy of Science:

141 For example, Cuomo 1998, 92-4, 101-2; Plumwood 1993, 131-2.

142 Solomon argues that this is actually what David Hume also suggested, and insists: “An act (or an
emotion) that fits and makes sense in one’s life story can be said to be free (and one is thus responsible)
even if the act (or emotion) in question is inattentive, only quasi-intentional, habitual, spontaneous, or
even ‘automatic’.” Solomon 2003, 204-5.

143 According to Solomon, the concept of agency is “far more expansive than the limited realm of the
will.” Solomon 2003, 206. There is also a practical moral perspective in how values and the emotions
behind them are considered: “The main consideration is this: how we think about our emotions – as
something we suffer or as something we “do” – will deeply affect both our behaviour and our
understanding of our behaviour. In other words, theses about emotions tend to be self-conforming.”
matter concerning the way she conceptualises the moral significance of mining the landscape, the torturing of pets, or caring for plants, simplifies the idea of moral perspective.¹⁴⁴ In modern ethics, a strong belief seems to prevail that the agent’s non-moral actions do not influence the conditions of moral agency. This belief hinders ethics from being practically reliable and should, therefore, be questioned in order to reconsider the role of environmental issues in ethics. Appealing to a theory without conceptual criticism about its view of humanity does not seem to be a way to solve the basic dilemma of environmental ethics. The moral arguments grounded on the analogy between moral agents and moral patients carry on the idea of an isolated exceptional agent and the otherness of those who are different.

The dilemma between moral autonomy and the contextual human mind will not be solved in this study. Perhaps it never will be, or at best it will take a long time for our most astute philosophers to solve it. But meanwhile, I argue that explanations of the human operations of the mind – will, reason, perception and motivation – and the meaning of these explanations for the theory of ethics – the idea of moral reasons, and the autonomy and authority of ethics – should be critically examined for environmental reasons. In environmental ethics, evolutionary ethicists (by appealing to natural sciences) and ecofeminists (by appealing to social sciences and philosophy), at least, call for taking the contextuality of the agent better into account, and a nuanced definition of freedom is recognised as being important beyond these two critical approaches.¹⁴⁵ Discussion on the gap between freedom and nature, which has been highlighted in recent environmental philosophy, has risen to stage the idea of a less-than-absolute dichotomy.¹⁴⁶

I have argued here that the extensional strategy for environmental ethics includes problems that weaken its efficiency and motivation, since it misplaces the focus of environmental ethics: the focus of the criterion for something to have moral status simply strengthens the idea that ethics is restricted to a concern the relationships between exceptional individuals who are isolated from a cruel nature. Despite its practical usefulness in some issues of animal ethics, the extensional strategy maintains the modernist presuppositions of justificatory anthropocentrism. This makes it weak in facing the general problem of moral theories to solve complex environmental issues. I argue that the focus should be turned to the quest for alternative conceptions of moral agency.

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, Preston 2001; Rowlands 2003.
¹⁴⁵ For example, Kirkman 2007, 5.
¹⁴⁶ For example, Robert Kirkman questions both the absolute interpretation of this gap, as well as simple unification of the aspects. The gap should not be seen as absolute, as Kant claims in his antimony thesis, but neither should it be mutually reductive, as some evolutionary psychologists argue when drawing political and moral implications from empirically explained codes of the brain. This question is shared by many, but solutions vary. Kirkman’s solution is to combine rationalist and empiricist approaches by appealing to teleology to provide an organic view, which he calls Darwinian humanism. Kirkman 2009, 218, 219, 233-4. My supposition is that the dichotomy is sustained by lack of recognition of the complexity of each kind of the agent’s operations, those called either “free” or “natural”.
2.3 Morality of Agency in Evolutionary Environmental Ethics — A Naturalist Alternative to the Dichotomised Moral Agent

2.3.1 Natural Sciences, Human Nature and Environmental Ethics

Environmental ethics has its historical roots in the natural sciences and environmental activism, besides traditional moral and philosophical discussions, and the attempt to seek a scientifically sound model of ethics has remained central. However, the use of the natural sciences varies and sometimes it may be selective.147 The difficult outcomes of scientific inquiry are sometimes subsumed under notions that are found to be more helpful, such as the ecological model of nature.148 Therefore, it is not only that environmental ethicists’ use of scientific arguments may imply deriving “ought” from “is”, but more notably, “the ought they are deriving represents only a part of nature’s is, as science understands it”.149

Due to Darwinian influence, the shared animal nature, the evolutionary continuum between human and nonhuman nature, and ecological interrelatedness are widely defended by environmental ethicists. However, these issues also reveal a dilemma for environmental philosophy: such notions may call autonomous moral agency into question. The challenging implications for ethics are not often properly worked out, and instead metaphysical revisions are called for to resolve the dilemma.150 Continuity, for example, is often simply taken as a support for extending the membership of a moral community on the grounds of sameness, or analogy, as described earlier. Interrelatedness, on the other hand, has been used to justify holist notions of the moral self as grounds for ontological extensions of agency – sometimes even to the extent of being comparable with egoism.151 In other words, it seems that some basic philosophical difficulties in facing the facts of human and nonhuman nature were in the last century often passed by, reducing the use of natural sciences either to pointing out “morally relevant” (a term used unquestioningly as such) similarities between human and animal nature, or to defending metaphysical holism.

147 Sideris 2003, 11-44, and Sideris 2015, 137.
148 Some of the widely used scientific notions in environmental philosophy are outdated or inadequate, such as the romanticised notion of a natural community as a self-regulating superorganism, which is loosely based on ecosystem ecology. Ecosystem ecology has deeply influenced environmental ethics and opinions about its philosophical implications. Deep ecologists, such as Arne Naess, defenders of land ethics, such as J. Baird Callicott, and ecohumanists, such as Andrew Brennan, are all aware of its ethical importance, though they look at it in very different ways.
149 Sideris 2003, 26-7.
150 It seems that environmental philosophy on the one hand, and the philosophy of biology and the philosophy of the mind on the other, have not cooperated very effectively. In my view, lack of interdisciplinary work in the different fields of philosophy has retarded the development of environmental ethics.
151 This is the criticism posed against some radical deep ecologists’ views, notably Arne Naess, but also against some land ethicists, such as J. Baird Callicott. According to Naess, “[t]he requisite care flows naturally if the Self is widened and deepened so that protection of free nature is felt and conceived of as protection of our very selves.” Naess 1988, 29. For criticism, see e.g. Brennan 1988, 143-44; Plumwood 1993, 180; Warren & Cheney 1991.
By contrast, interdisciplinary work in environmental philosophy should be interested in taking the challenges of science seriously, though not blindly. Among these challenges, those posed to the concept of moral agency and the meaning of human animality are crucial: evolutionary mechanisms and the systemic structures of nature can fundamentally elucidate human ways of acting and reasoning. Questions about the nature of earthly agents are empirical ones.

The reliability of normative theories and their political use require scientific plausibility. Sociobiologist Edward O. Wilson, for example, criticised John Rawls for alienating moral theories from scientific realities, which again leads to a mistaken emphasis on the conceptual isolation between “is” and “ought”. Rawls ventured no thought on where the human brain comes from or how it works. He offered no evidence that justice-as-fairness is consistent with human nature, hence practicable as a blanket premise. [...] Many philosophers will respond by saying, ethicists don’t need that kind of information.”

First, explanations that put humans on the same line as other natural beings may threaten the common conceptions of moral autonomy – and in consequence, responsibility. Second, empiricism that reduces moral motivation and conducts to natural explanations about cultural manners or religious outlooks may threaten the autonomy and authority of ethics, as well as the idea of normativity. Rejection of scientific understanding is not an answer: it would threaten the plausibility and practical import of ethics in the human way of life, societies and culture. It should also be noted that scientific theories about human nature are numerous. Approaches that critically aspire to avoid both simplified explanatory and justificatory reduction, as well as the rejection of challenging scientific facts are, to my understanding, urgently needed in environmental ethics.

Theories of human nature are combinations of views which take up positions in relation to different questions. With regard to moral traits, the building blocks for

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152 It should be noted, however, that an opposite tendency has arisen recently based on sociobiology and evolutionary psychology overemphasising the meaning and ability of science, or what E.O. Wilson calls the “consilience” of science. The interests of some scientists and religious scholars meet in this project. Together they defend science as a worldview with the new myth potential of offering not just explanations, but also reasons, meanings and values. “The Epic of Evolution”, or the “Universe Story” is offered to displace the grand narratives of religions and other particular worldviews with the universal, “sacralised science”. In defence of the mythical or spiritual role of science, see Swimme & Berry 1992; Wilson 1998; Dawkins 2011. Among the considerable problems of this project, in my view, is that however plausible and attractive a worldview might be, it cannot survive, as a set of empirical facts, as a source of normativity without additional supreme dignities, such as humanity – which is, in fact, often the implicit addition. For an analysis of Richard Dawkins’s view, see Sideris 2017, 31-5. In this sense, all particular worldviews share the same weakness: an agent needs to believe in the offered dignity in order to make moral judgements based on the facts. The lack of reasons to adopt this dignity remains. See Sideris 2015, 152. For an early criticism of the myths of science, see Mary Midgley, Evolution as a Religion (London: Routledge 1985); Midgley 2000, 2004. For recent general criticism of “sacralised” or “consecrated” science, see Sideris 2015 and 2017.

153 Interestingly, I think, the scientifically plausible conception of a human agent has interested, perhaps more than others, humanist environmentalists. See, for example, Brennan 1988, 183-4, 221; Kirkman 2007, 2009; Korsgaard 2012a, b, and c.


155 According to Wilson, this is should not be considered as a problem. To “translate is into ought makes sense if we attend the objective meaning of ethical precepts. [...] They are more likely to be products of the brain and the culture. [...] and are no more than principles of the social contract hardened into rules and dictates.” Wilson 1998, 57. For more about the general problems in empiricism in ethics and religion, see Mikael Stenmark’s thorough analysis of scientism. Stenmark 2001.
explanations include, for example, views that concern human nature (1) as compared to nonhuman, (2) as constructed (blank paper) or given (full paper), (3) as plastic or fixed, (4) as material or mental, (5) as determined or free, (6) as causal or teleological, (7) as naturally motivated or not to act morally (optimistic versus pessimistic views), (8) as mortal or immortal, (9) as self or non-self, and (10) as descriptive or prescriptively laden (allowing the use of concepts like flourishing normatively). For a theory of moral agency that could deal with human relationships in relation to non-human reality, the relevance of a theory of human nature is in the features that deal with the mechanisms of creating meanings and values, setting aims, reasoning, evaluating, and being motivated to act. While it is not insignificant whether human nature is given or constructed, mental or material, they are not as decisive as questions of freedom, plasticity, optimism and the normative status of human nature. For environmental ethics, however, comparison between human and nonhuman nature also plays an interesting role. On the one hand, the moral importance of ecological interrelatedness, the unity of life and the continuity between human and animal nature are stressed. On the other hand, however, human animality that rules out the non-natural, transcendental exceptionality of moral agency may threaten the entire idea of demanding moral duties, at least in the objective sense. Non-reductionist naturalist arguments might, therefore, carry some potentiality that could help in avoiding problematic aspects of both exceptionalism and reductionism.

In spite of the possibility of confusion and misinterpretation in discussing philosophy and empirical sciences, the attempt to take ecological and evolitional realities into account in a sound concept of moral agency is, precisely, the feature that makes environmental ethics of great value for a wider discussion of the self-understanding of ethics. If moral philosophy cannot face the challenges it has in dealing with human-caused planetary changes, the authority of ethics as such may degenerate. Theoretical research on ethics should not close our eyes from constantly increasing our understanding of human (and nonhuman) nature, action, intentionality, motivation and social life, if morality is regarded as worth being preserved as something that plays a role in people’s practical life. Without tools capable of guiding actions in the world of environmental destruction, morality may appear useless. The sciences also have instrumental value: they offer information to evaluate environmental consequences, assess political objectives, analyse discussions on values, and contribute politically.

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156 I follow here Mikael Stenmark’s list of ten key building blocks for a theory of human nature. See Stenmark 2012.

157 Realisation of this threat seems to imply, however, that a naturalist theory of human agency is reductionist (in the sense that agency is reducible to the nature of a human individual), and the fallacy of “is” to “ought” should be taken as absolute. It is worth noting that there are a number of evolutionary approaches. Within the limits of this study, however, it is not possible to thoroughly analyse and compare the different types.
2.3.2 NATURALISING MORAL AGENCY – DARWIN AND HIS FOLLOWERS

Features considered as decisive for the exceptionality of human moral agency – considered as a difference in kind, rather than just in the degree, between human and nonhuman beings – are freedom of choice, moral reasoning and the motivation to act for moral reasons. From the point of view of moral philosophy, they are important as they amount to autonomy, which is – in one form or another – a prerequisite of any idea of moral responsibility. Difference in intelligence, also regarded as important for moral ability, is more often considered a question of degree. As rational, free agents, humans are most often seen as unique. This uniqueness has been called into question by evolutionary explanations of morality.

The idea of human uniqueness has been an incessant target of suspicion among evolutionary scientists ever since Charles Darwin’s *The Descent of Man* (first published in 1871). Evolutionary biologists, anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists have offered empirical explanations for human capacities and dispositions associated with moral behaviour, such as altruism and cooperation. Darwin emphasises humanity as part of the unbroken chain of life. The moral senses make the most definite difference between humans and other animals. But, he claims, “the difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, is certainly one of degree and not of kind”. Moral senses are naturally evolved by social instincts, and lead to morality “with the aid of active intellectual powers and the effects of habit”. The fact that people universally in all cultures pass on values and behave according to certain standards supports, for Darwin, the notion that it is part of human nature to have moral senses. Despite the fact that moral dispositions depict specific nature of human species, their origin is in natural evolution. There is nothing non-natural in the idea that human beings are moral agents and have a sense of right and wrong. Hence, Darwinian understanding justifies non-dualism between humans and nature.

Evolutionary theories are currently taken seriously widely in moral philosophy. Environmental ethicists value the idea of the biological origins of morality and the continuum of agency between non-human and human actors especially for two reasons. First, they highlight the value of material, ecological and animal realities as central to the evolutionary history of human agents, which again maintains the aims

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158 “I fully subscribe to the judgment of those writers who maintain that of all the differences between man and the lower animals the moral sense or conscience is by far the most important.” Darwin 2001 (1877), 101.

159 Darwin 2001, 130.

160 “The moral sense perhaps affords the best and highest distinction between man and the lower animals; but I need not say anything on this head, as I have so lately endeavoured to show that the social instincts – the prime principle of man’s moral constitution – with the aid of active intellectual powers and the effects of habit, naturally lead to the golden rule [...] and this lies at the foundation of morality.” Darwin 2001, 131.

161 Another question, however, is whether even the ethical values that are partly shared throughout cultures and vary along with the natural habitats, are produced by biological evolution.

162 “I do not wish to maintain that any strictly social animal, if its intellectual faculties were to become as active and as highly developed as in man, would acquire the same moral sense as ours. [...] They might have a sense of right and wrong, though led by it to follow widely different lines of conduct.” Darwin 2001, 103. For more about the theme, see chapter 4, section 4.2.

of environmental ethics and deepens the theoretical discussion. It also opens philosophers’ eyes to the study of animal behaviour, including some elements from which we can learn about ourselves. Second, recognition of the natural origins and naturalness of the highest expression of the human uniqueness or exceptionality – our moral agency – forces us to humbly focus on the possibility that the best future for earth is not necessarily the one that we have created on the basis of our best understanding. We might be bound to our limited perspective – at least as individuals and groups containing some community of somewhat similar other individuals. Approaching the meaning of the concepts used in moral philosophy to depict truth, good and right might also require other species’ perspectives, and an understanding of the mechanisms by which various things in nature are interrelated.

In the Darwinian spirit, all evolutionary ethicists argue that moral senses, dispositions and traits are evolved through natural selection by adaptation. Usually they also argue that such dispositions are evolutionally profitable. Profitability may refer to genetical adaptations (genetic reductionism), or to a wider notion that also takes psychological and social adaptations into account.\textsuperscript{164} Explanations of moral senses and traits vary, however, due to the view of natural selection adopted: they can be seen to result from survival-oriented selection, as they are profitable adaptations for survival at the level of (a) individuals (following, e.g., Herbert Spencer’s theory of Social Darwinism), (b) species or populations (which may be closest to Darwin’s own view), (c) relatives (following William Hamilton’s kin selection theory),\textsuperscript{165} (d) groups (e.g. sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists loosely following V. C. Wynne-Edwards and Konrad Lorenz, or John Maynard Smith, for example), or (e) genes (a view made commonly known especially by Richard Dawkins). In addition to different biological interpretations of natural selection, moral tendencies and dispositions may be reduced to a synthesis of several scientific fields, including most notably psychology and anthropology.\textsuperscript{166} Besides reductive approaches, an empirical approach may also take a non-reductive form to seek reasons for certain manifestations of morality to occur. Although moral dispositions are evolved as capacities, their use and cultivation may still be non-profitable for genetic fitness and express some culturally developed aims instead. Different explanations have different philosophical implications, and this should be kept in mind.

Altruism, sacrificial love and cooperative sacrifice as traits did not fit into the original Darwinian theory, and explanation of moral behaviour compelled evolutionary scientists to develop further theories. The empirical fact that altruism,

\textsuperscript{164} When I refer to this group of loosely similar arguments, regardless of their adaptational view, I shall call them evolutionary ethicists.

\textsuperscript{165} Kin selection theory explains altruistic social behaviour by the survival of one’s genetic heredity. According to E. O. Wilson “organisms can improve their own reproductive strength (their inclusive fitness) by aiding the reproduction of close relatives, who share many of the same genes”. Genetic traits will survive better if close relatives are not selfish. He adopted the theory for his studies on ant communities. Ruse 1999, 174.

\textsuperscript{166} Historically speaking, trust in the explanatory force of biology dominated until the 1970s, and in sociobiology and afterwards in psychology, anthropology and sociology, it has been taken to be an important part of sound explanations. Compare, for example, E. O. Wilson’s On Human Nature (1978) or Richard Dawkins’s The Selfish Gene (originally 1976) with Leda Cosmides’ & John Tooby’s “Evolutionary Psychology: New Perspectives on Cognition and Motivation,” Annual Review of Psychology 64 (2013): 201-29.
sacrificial love and cooperative sacrifice as traits exist, and that moral beliefs widely claim moral commitment, challenged Darwin’s view. It compelled evolutionary theorists to develop further theories to explain moral behaviour.\footnote{Schloss 2004, 10.} Social Darwinism, developed by Darwin’s fellow scientist Herbert Spencer, argued that there is progress in the natural evolution of species, and this biological progress is depicted in the development of society, art and other fields of human activity: evolution goes hand in hand with social development.\footnote{Farber 1994, 118-9, 122. Spencer held progress in moral culture to be inevitable, even though it was not seen as a function of natural selection, but rather a human spiritual and psycho-social activity. Progress was, according to him, a move from the undifferentiated to the differentiated: as complexity increases so the individuals become more developed in the prescriptive sense. Herbert Spencer, Social Statics, Or the Conditions Essential to Human Happiness Specified and the First of Them Developed. (London: J. Chapman, 1851), 323-4. Quoted in Ruse 2004, 29-30.} After World War I Social Darwinism declined in popularity and was treated as ethically suspect, though some followers developed the idea by appealing to Freudian psychology.

Julian Huxley, an architect of neo-Darwinian theory, was among them. He argued that evolution is a progressive process with three stages: cosmic, biological and socio-psychological stage. He grounded his view on the theory originally defended by his grandfather, Darwin’s contemporary Thomas Henry Huxley, who argued that morality is exclusively a cultural innovation that sets human psyche at war with its own nature.\footnote{According to Huxley, the human psyche is alienated in the cosmos, and moral society is in conflict with the natural evolved conditions of life. Morality is needed for human success and happiness. See Huxley 2009, xxv-xxxiv, 35-6, 75-6.} Unlike Darwin, but like his grandfather, Julian Huxley argued for discontinuity between man and other species by differentiating between biological and socio-psychological progress: humans are unique in kind. Cultural progress is not based on biological trends, although it is determined. Because of the psychosocial stage of evolutionary progress, human cultural and moral development is unique. Huxley also argued that the only “path of unlimited progress” is the one that is included in human mental abilities.\footnote{Julian Huxley, The Uniqueness of Man (London: Chatto and Windus, 1941), 115. Farber 1994, 130-136; Teich, Mikulas, Roy Porter & Bo Gustafsson, Nature and Society in Historical Context (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 301. For Thomas Henry Huxley’s position, see Michel Ruse’s “Introduction” in Huxley 2009.} He believed that the only – or at least best – progress takes place in the self-control and independence of the human mind. As a progressivist he thought that cultural progress through moral development necessarily creates ever better civilisations.\footnote{In a way, the theory is a kind of “religious humanism”, or “religion without revelation,” which could, according to Huxley’s hope, overcome the dichotomy between human intentional purposes and the natural causality of evolutionary process. Farber 1994, 127-31, 148-9. For the recent adoption of the view among American religious environmentalists, see Sideris 2017, 157-160.}

The problem of neo-Darwinian theory, from the point of view of environmental ethics, lies in the supposed discontinuity between man and the rest of nature, and belief in the inevitable progress of development. Together these views implicate the superiority of the human moral agent over the “lower” species, and hence, perhaps even justify subordination of nature. Following Huxley, neo-Darwinian theory denies the Darwinian idea of qualitative continuity between different forms of life amounting from gradual evolution. From the point of view of the idea of moral agency, this difference is significant: discontinuity maintains the idea that complex mental and
Moral abilities are separated from the nature of agents, belonging to the sphere of cultural development, which is distinct from the material environment influencing adaptation. This has been criticised by, for instance, a prominent primatologist Frans de Waal. He argues that moral ability in Huxley’s theory is implausibly separated from natural humanness and contrasts with it. Morality is considered a “thin veneer” over the human nature determined by constitutive selfishness. In spite of breaking the continuum between men and the rest of the nature, Huxley’s position splits humanness into natural and non-natural elements. However, the neo-Darwinian appeal to the progress of cultural evolution, on the one hand, and the synthesis of natural, psychological and social sciences, on the other hand, attracts some environmentalists. Especially those who prefer a mythic or religious story as a background for moral conducts may favour such an approach. Scientific optimism and the harmonious story of nature unveiled by unified science represents for certain environmentalists a source of wonder comparable to the religious one.

Most evolutionary ethicists after Huxley adapted a psychoanalytical explanation of moral obligation, whereas before it was derived from biology. Philosophers commonly regard both evolutionary explanations of morality with suspicion: the link between empirical explanations and their moral implications is not clear. Although the validity of moral sentiments could be derived from the psychological nature of human species, the relevance of these sentiments for ethics cannot. In 20th century moral philosophy, biological foundations were put aside, and the study of the origins of ethics focused on the history of philosophy and social sciences. Especially G. E. Moore’s criticism on moral naturalism turned the focus to philosophical issues, especially moral language. This had an influence on divorcing questions about (human) nature from moral philosophy, especially in the case of rationalist and cognitivist theories.

This was the dominant framework for normative ethics in the late 20th century when environmental ethicists tried systematically to justify responsibilities for non-human nature. There might, therefore, have been natural reasons for environmentalists to take up a renewed interest in the evolutionary approach along with sociobiology, launched by Edward O. Wilson in his seminal *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (1975). Sociobiology emerged as a biological explanation of human culture and behaviour on Darwinian and neo-Darwinian grounds, and critical questions about moral agency became a vivid part of environmental discussion especially through Wilson’s influence at that time. Many of the notable lines of

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172 “Veneer theory” is a term launched by de Waal to criticise certain neo-Darwinian positions. See, de Waal 2006, 7-12. For a critical discussion of de Waal’s criticism, see the Kitcher 2006 and Singer 2006 and de Waal’s response in the same volume.

173 A theological question could be related here concerning the difference between Lutheran and say evangelical theological ethics, among the Reformation denominations. According to Lutheran natural law ethics, faith and the grace of God do not add anything to the moral ability and consciousness, while the American evangelical tradition, for example, commonly defend moral conducts as achieved through God’s legislative will in the Bible. An interesting question for theologians could be whether Lutherans are more inclined to be Darwinians than evangelicals.

174 As optimism for science as the crown of human culture is not a scientific outcome as such, it emphasises the exceptionality and mythic power of humans. For a closer analysis, see Midgley 2004; Sideris 2017, 32-5. See also Sideris 2015, 139, 144-46; Deane-Drummond 2015, 172.

175 Farber 1994, 134. A criticism put forward e.g. by Henry Sidgwick.

environmental ethics owe a debt to sociobiology, among others, Peter Singer’s utilitarian subjective naturalism and holistic naturalism defended, for example, by Holmes Rolston III, besides philosophers who more clearly focus on the implications of sociobiology in ethics, such as Mary Midgley and Michael Ruse.177

According to sociobiology, natural selection has a strong explanatory force for the ongoing processes of both biological and cultural evolution: nurturing, cultural manners, moral senses and behaviour can be explained by the interaction between genes and the environment.178 Besides moral senses, morality as a phenomenon, moral rationality and perhaps even the content of moral conducts are also explainable by biology and the natural sociality of our species. Morality is in a way justified by the study of genetics: it is our natural inclination to be moral for the sake of our genetic progress: altruism ensures a greater number of similar genes to be passed on than non-altruistic behaviour.179 Morality as a phenomenon is “the morality of the gene”.180 Hence, the study of moral agency is reducible to the study of genetics: moral conduct is based on moral senses, which are explained by biologically evolved emotional control centres in systems of the brain, especially to limbic systems evolved through adaptation in evolutionary time.181 Evolutionary ethicists after Wilson’s *Sociobiology* mainly deny, however, that either individual or group-selfishness, by which morality can genetically be explained, would as such be profitable for evolution. Explanation of complex moral systems requires a wider empirical perspective on motivation, since culture also influences survival.182 Wilson himself later noted the problems in explaining morality by reference to profitability. He admits that morality and religion form the most interesting and humbling challenges for science.183 In spite of this, Wilson’s theory is reductionist in the end, although he has softened it in his later works.184

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177 See, for example, Rolston’s *Genes, Genesis, and God: Values and Their Origins in Natural and Human History* (1999). Singer was especially influenced by Henry Sidgwick. For a closer analysis, see Farber 1994, 170, 174. Midgley’s and Ruse’s positions, it is worth pointing out, strongly oppose each other. From the point of view of the implications for moral agency, see Midgley’s *The Ethical Primate* (1994) and Ruse’s *Taking Darwin Seriously* (1999). Ruse developed his position on evolutionary ethics with E. O. Wilson (See Ruse & Wilson 1989); see also Ruse 2010. While Ruse fully approves of the notion that ethics is what it is for biological reasons, Midgley thinks that biological and cultural elements are intervowen in the natural processes, both concerning moral capacity and norms. I shall return to Midgley’s view later.


179 Wilson adopts William Hamilton’s kin selection theory to explain altruistic social behaviour among animals. According to this theory, the survival of one’s genetic heredity is the prime motivator for action, but it is not reached by striving for self-profit rather by aiding those who share the same genes. By altruistic behaviour, thus, organisms best improve their inclusive fitness. See, e.g. Wilson 1978, 153-4; Ruse 1999, 174; Farber 1994, 152.

180 “[S]elf-knowledge is constrained and shaped by the emotional control centers in the hypothalamus and limbic system of the brain. These centers flood our consciousness with all the emotions – hate, love, guilt, fear, and others – that are consulted by ethical philosophers who wish to intuit the standards of good and evil. What, we are then to ask, made the hypothalamus and limbic system? They evolved by natural selection.” Wilson 1975, 3.

181 Wilson 1978, 41, 68.


183 Wilson 1998, 296. Cf. one of his followers, Richard Dawkins, who states: “If you look at the way natural selection works, it seems to follow that anything that has evolved by natural selection should be selfish. [...] When we go and look at the behaviour of baboons, humans, and all other living creatures, we will find it to be selfish.” Dawkins 2016, 5.

184 Ethical precepts will turn out more likely to be “physical products of the brain and culture” than “ethereal messages outside humanity awaiting revelation, or independent truths vibrating in a
An environmentalist philosopher and sociobiologist Michael Ruse argues that there is no reason to think that psychological capacities could not be motivated by the biological self. Instead of selfishness, it is morality – one based on altruist claims – that brings about “the best” environment for the genes of an individual human to survive in. Morality thus is an adaptation like hands and genitals. Ruse’s conception of moral agency delineates three levels of desire. Desires at the lowest level are basic, and they motivate both human agents and non-human choice-makers to action. Humans alone, however, have second-order desires through reflective self-evaluation: at this level free will is used to choose between competing first-order desires. Moral choices are made at the level of third-order desires, by which we can prioritise our already reflected on volitions that are competing with each other.

Moral sentiments of altruism are naturally evolved, but they must be distinguished from biologically profitable “altruism” and altruism in the literal sense, referring to the feeling of the need to act kindly “simply because this is the right thing to do”.

Ruse’s metanarrative about ethics is, however, that of efficient evolution: morality (altruism in the literal sense), is the best pragmatic strategy to attain biologically profitable quasi-altruism (“altruism”). This means that in order to most efficiently serve our “selfish genes”, we should not be selfish. The failure of Social Darwinism, according to Ruse, was that it tried to justify moral codes by making an appeal to the progressivness of evolution by claiming that ethics promotes this progress. Ruse denies belief in progress and argues that ethics has no other reason to exist than biological adaptation: it just is as it is an adaptation of social humans to live a social life. But because this view of ethics does not commit anyone to sacrifices, Ruse claims that we have created systems to justify “that it is more than it is”. Thus, he argues that “ethics is an illusion put in place by our genes to make us good social co-operators.”

The sociobiological view of human nature and agency is criticised for its essentialism and genetic reductionism. According to critics, among which there are many feminist philosophers, by explaining all kinds of human behaviour – sexuality, aggression, dominance, the caste system, labour division, parental care, and religion – in terms of genetics, sociobiology strengthens essentialism. Characteristics profitable for evolutionary fitness are seen as essentially better than others. Through genetic reductionism, sociobiology reduces not only emotions and motives, but also nonmaterial dimension of mind”. Wilson 1998, 278. For reduction as scientific method, see Wilson 1978, 11.

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185 Ruse 2004, 44-5.
186 Ruse 1999, 174; Farber 1994, 152.
187 Ruse 2010, 297, 303. The view of morality as adaptation is also criticised among philosophers of biology, see e.g. Ayala 2010 in the same volume. According to Ayala, ethical behaviour is not adaptive in itself, but “a necessary consequence of human’s eminent intellectual abilities, which are an attribute directly promoted by natural selection.” Ayala 2010, 316.
188 Ruse compares third-order desires with an advanced version of a chess-playing machine which uses more general but practically useful principles rather than calculating all the options. Ruse 2001, 212-5.
189 “Indeed, the very crux of the sociobiological case is that we need real altruism to make us break through our usual selfishness.” Ruse 2001, 191-2, 195.
190 Dawkins’s The Selfish Gene, in particular, opened up a critical debate on sociobiology. The most notable critic was Mary Midgley.
ethical systems to genetics. On the side of feminist constructionists, this criticism is then part of their fight against an essentialism that legitimises unequal socioeconomic structures. According to some critics, Wilson’s view of humankind endorses the biases of his social and cultural class (white, middle-class, heterosexual males from the US South). He describes social and behavioural differences, such as homosexuality, as differences requiring a biological explanation: differences among men are abnormalities, eventually evolved for somehow strengthening the normal traits of behaviour. The third distinctive feature of Wilson’s sociobiology that is criticised is his belief in progress. According to Wilson, all social behaviour, intentional activities and ethics included, work towards evolutionary progress. Wilson acknowledges, however, that “the evolutionary epic” is a “myth” and this “myth” is the core of scientific materialism. But he thinks it is the best explanation for the whole universe that we see and experience today.

Contrary to both Wilson and Ruse, an evolutionary ethicist, philosopher of biology, and feminist, Mary Midgley, seeks for a more complex, and explicitly non-reductionist position with regard to evolution, which she calls a “middle way”. For both the reductionist and non-reductionist accounts of moral agency, each agent is individually affected by the whole evolutionary history of the human body. The limbic system releases hormones which drive us to certain actions. But according to non-reductionists, responses to evolved bodily messages are not hardwired. Rather, the way the brains are trained by the environment, especially by the social community, is a definitive factor in how people respond.

Evolutionary psychology, currently the dominant evolutionary explanation of morality, has softened the role of determinism by combining humanitarian perspectives with the originally sociobiological position. In Jerome Barkow, Leda Cosmides and John Tooby’s *The Adapted Mind* (1992) three theses are defended. First, universal human nature “exists primarily at the level of evolved psychological mechanisms, not of expressed cultural behaviors”. Second, these mechanisms “are adaptations, constructed by natural selection over evolutionary time”. Third, “the human mind is adapted to the way of life of Pleistocene hunter-gatherers”, which means that the modern circumstances may be radically different compared to those our mind is adapted to. In sum, the human mind and its functional design features should be seen as responses to those demands that were faced by our hunter-gatherer ancestors. The adaptions of the mind (e.g. morality) ensured quick and efficient

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192 It should be noted, however, that there are prominent philosophers who lean on Wilson’s sociobiology and argue for a much more complicated view. Ruse, for example, although defending metaethical reduction of ethics to evolutionary fitness, denies it on the level of normative systems. For his interpretation about the Darwinian view of culture, see e.g Ruse 1998, 123-6.

193 For example, Richard Lewontin and Michael Ruse.

194 For an explanation of homosexuality, for example, see Wilson 1978, 143-46.


196 Midgley 1994, 159.

197 Clayton 2004, 319, 325. I shall return to the question of reductionism in chapters 3 and 4.
responses to environmental challenges. Slightly varying explanations have been developed on this ground by psychologists, anthropologists and neuroscientists.

In contrast to sociobiology, evolutionary psychologists consider that besides genetic fitness, social experiences and learning determine human behaviour. They argue that evolved moral psychological manners and the changes in them often reflect cultural rather than genetic adaptations: people adopt them because of some wider interests of a larger group of beings, bound together by a common fate and common prospects. In the environmental discussion Elliot Sober and David Sloan Wilson, for instance, defend this kind of idea and criticise individually and genetically oriented interpretations. Evolutionary psychology thus extends the sphere of explanation by adding social and cultural determinants to the biological ones. Therefore, in moral philosophy, evolutionary psychology is more sensitive to cultural variety than its predecessors. However, the design features of organisms, the human mind included, are seen as causally related to adaptive problems. The mental design generated through adaptation is then panhuman and universal for all members of our species.

This means, among other things, that standard evolutionary psychology implies the acceptance of a functionalist notion of ethics. But in contrast to suppositions of selfishness as the guiding principle for adaptation, it emphasises the complex mechanisms that make cooperation profitable. Social life and cognitive adaptations for altruistic, cooperative traits are in its explanatory focus. Extension of the scientific ground for empirical explanation does not negate reductionism as such. In spite of distancing from simplistic genetic determination and adopting more complex explanations of moral reasoning and codes, they still seek some universal explanations for particular cultural expressions through the idea of “the adapted mind”. As an empiricist approach to morality, evolutionary psychology reduces reasons for action to scientific explanations of the adapted mind. Hence, it maintains a monistic view and ignores the possibility of interactivity between actions and adaptive mechanisms in, for instance, moral development. From the philosophical point of view, the question about the reductionism of moral agency remains quite similar to both sociobiology and evolutionary psychology.

The perspective of evolutionary psychology has some benefits from the point of view of environmental ethics. First, it offers the connection between environmentally functional behaviour and moral inclinations. Second, it advises not to straightforwardly listen to these inclinations, since they are adaptations to a very different environment than we currently deal with. Third, it calls for a more interactive understanding of not just emotive but also cognitive mental operations. The second point could be applied to the argument for cultural obligations to be aware of these inclinations and to formulate codes that function best in meeting

198 Barkow, Cosmides & Tooby 1992, 4-5.
200 Biologist Richard Lewontin, for instance, argues that the significant difference lies in giving up the genetic reductionism of human consciousness. “They have been replaced by an entirely new level of causation, that of social interaction with its own laws and its own nature.” Lewontin 1991, 123. Cf. Wilson 1975, 548.
201 Barkow, Cosmides & Tooby 1992, 5, 8.
203 Barkow, Cosmides & Tooby, 1992, 45.
environmental challenges. The third point refers to the meaning of cooperative adaptations. It could be used in justifying the need for environmental non-selfishness and collective duties.

Evolutionary psychological arguments can benefit the moral philosophical discussion especially at three points: they question the common understanding of individual and extremely free moral agent, they cast light to the embodied nature of mind, and they concentrate on scientific evidences that deny dualism about human nature.\(^{204}\) In this sense, evolutionary psychology follows the original Darwinian view of qualitative continuity between the species. Serious aspiration to combine the empiric biological, psychological and neurological evidences with the philosophy of mind has notably developed the understanding of human mind and mental operations as what I will call relational: fundamentally enactive, embodied, and extensional. However, evolutionary psychology seems to stick to scientific, specifically biological imperialism in its ideal of explaining the universal “panhuman” design of the mind by the unified scientific method. In this sense, much of the criticisms made against its sibling sociobiology also hold for evolutionary psychology. But the steps it took guided an evolutionary approach towards a more complex understanding of human agency and mental operations, such as reasoning and motivation, make a change that opens up a road to a more relational view of natural agents.

2.3.3 AUTONOMY AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY THREATENED?

Demystification of humanity promotes our nonhuman kin and removes humans from a conceptually exceptional status. But Darwinian non-dualism providing such demystification challenges the common understanding of the conditions of autonomy, and could, therefore, also be seen to diminish moral responsibility. There are three common responses to this threat. According to the first, the idea of genuine morality and autonomy includes mystical elements, and it is abandoned. For the second, some vital element of a miracle-type self-determining power is thought to remain. For the third, Darwinian naturalism is seen as compatible with the capacities of autonomy, responsibility, and free action to at least the extent that it does not threaten normative ethics.\(^{205}\) In addition to these, a fourth response has entered into the discussion. It calls for the reconceptualisation of the notions of autonomy, free will and morality. Despite being vitally important and distinctive for human animals, these features are neither miraculous nor non-natural. Evolutionary naturalism challenges human exclusivity with respect to autonomy and morality: as adaptations, moral capacities may also be adapted by other species.\(^{206}\)

\(^{204}\) E.g. Barkow, Cosmides & Tooby 1992, 49-50.


\(^{206}\) Waller 1998, 3, 55. One solution, offered e.g. by Bruce Waller, is to conceptually separate between autonomy and moral responsibility. Take-charge responsibility requires that an autonomous person “has
The Darwinian defence of the qualitative evolutionary continuum between human culture and the rest of nature is conceptually important for reconsidering the exceptionality or uniqueness of human moral agency. According to Darwin, natural agency and moral agency are not disconnected. “Nature” as such is capable of developing agency for genuinely non-profitable behaviour. Darwin’s conception of human nature is, thus, optimistic. In contrast, for example Thomas Henry Huxley, Julian Huxley, and more currently Richard Dawkins, argue that there is a gap between evolved, selfish nature – in which actions are determined – and morally potential, culturally developed agency – which is capable of restricting selfish genetic determination. At the end of *The Selfish Gene*, Dawkins expresses optimism about human unselfishness and cultural progress: “It is possible that yet another unique quality of man is a capacity for genuine, disinterested, true altruism. [...] We are built as gene machines and cultured as meme machines, but we have the power to turn against our creators. We, alone on earth, can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators.” This view represents pessimism about the human natural capacity for moral action. Together with pessimism about innate human nature, such views may call for optimism about the culturally developed capacities that make humans resist this natural selfishness. The idea of freedom is thus restricted to cultural capacities. Frans de Waal’s criticism defines this kind of moral agency as a “veneer” laid over human nature.

Wilson follows Darwin in arguing that there is a continuum between humans and the rest of the nature but adds that culture is primarily a species-specific property of human beings – although some traits of culture can also be found in animal communities. As an exceptionally human phenomenon, culture goes beyond purely biological evolution – despite the fact that every “human” property has its origin in nature. According to Wilson, human nature was adaptive “at the time of its genetic origin”, but due to gene-culture coevolution, this turns into what he calls a “paradox”: “At the same time that culture arises from human action, human action arises from culture.” Ruse follows in many respects Wilson, but he defends evolutionary naturalism and scepticism in a stricter sense.

opportunities to pursue genuine alternatives”, but this does not require transcending one’s environmental history. For revised conceptions of autonomy, see chapter 3.

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207 Dawkins describes the cultural, exceptional content of replication as “memes”, and the mechanism of replication as “imitation”. For self-copying memes, and memetic evolution, see Dawkins 2016, 247-59.

208 Dawkins 2016, 260.

209 As far as I understand, pessimism derives most importantly from genetic reductivism, because “[a] simple replicator, whether gene or meme, cannot be expressed to forego short-term selfish advantage even if it would really pay it, in the long term, to do so.” One could speculate, however, whether this description of the gene necessarily amounts to pessimism if the operations on various levels are seen as interactive. See, e.g., Dawkins 2016, 260. Through game theoretical analysis about successful strategies, Dawkins argues that in contrast to genetic evolution, human memetic culture should prefer cooperation and niceness – especially a tit for tat type of strategy. Dawkins 2016, 271-84, 292-3.

210 Julian Huxley thought that evolution can be promoted by spreading science. Cultural structures and especially scientific work represent the second level of forging evolution. This implies that humankind will be able to conquer life and nature and design a happier future. Ruse 1995, 228.

211 De Waal 2005, 19-23.


213 Ruse 1995, 241-2; Ruse 2010, 312.

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An acute question for an evolutionary approach towards human agency concerns the prerequisites for responsibility, among which freedom of action is perhaps the most discussed. Cartesian dualism that dichotomises between body with machine-like causal activities, and mind with free intentional agency represented for Darwin an attempt to preserve a somewhat essentialist idea of the human subject as ontologically exceptional entity. Darwin’s theory debunks, first and foremost, the essentialist view of any biological being. For Darwin, morality is included in nature, while Thomas Henry Huxley’s dualism “pits morality against nature and humanity against other animals”. Continuity is a challenging idea for the traditional understanding of autonomy and responsibility. However, the discontinuity thesis seems (a) strange from the scientific point of view and (b) philosophically problematic due to its detached optimism and for passing over the natural conditions of agency as positive limits for the design of the future. As critics of Dawkins argue, defence of the discontinuity thesis may have emerged just from a supposition that radical freedom is a requirement for moral agency. As if adding the idea of exceptional freedom to humans would make a radical evolutionary theory about human nature more acceptable to philosophers.

As will become clear, the argument of this study disagrees with such a supposition. I argue that attempts to formulate more modest conceptions of freedom and autonomy, scientifically plausible but still uncertain, have not been properly acknowledged in philosophy. This is, perhaps, due to the inclination of some notable evolutionary scientists to adopt a philosophical supposition that for moral actions to be non-profitable would require properties that are disconnected from evolutionary forces. The hardwired views that defend either the evolutionary debunking arguments, or the superiority of human (cultural/moral) species to exceed its own (selfish) nature have dominated the philosophical discussion. In contrast to that, environmental ethicists are willing to take seriously the complexity of evolutionary mechanisms. They seem widely ready to defend Darwin’s rather than Huxley’s view about moral agency.

The continuity thesis forces moral philosophers to closely scrutinise whether common modern suppositions about deliberative operations hold in scientific examinations. My supposition is that such a humble conceptual scrutiny of the function of human moral capacities is something that normative ethics urgently needs – not only for environmental ethics, but also for the ethics of artificial intelligence and biotechnology, for example. Different questions, should, however, be kept

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214 For Huxley’s position, see Adrian Desmond, *Huxley: From Devil’s Disciple to Evolution’s High Priest* (New York: Perseus 1994), 599; De Waal 2006, 8. The disconnection between natural and ethical properties, and the absolute, Kantian way of understanding freedom can also be seen as central presuppositions of the evolutionary debunking arguments that aim at the reduction of ethics to natural science. For support for this interpretation, see Kirkman 2009, 218; FitzPatrick 2017, 6-7; Sideris 2007, 76-8. In Sideris’s words, “Darwin’s worldview decentered humans; Dawkins’s (and especially, Levine believes, E.O. Wilson’s) worldview puts humans and the human mind front and center.” Sideris 2007, 78. Sideris’s focus is slightly different as she notes that the reductionism emerges especially from the superior role of science, empowered by the “myth of unified science”, a kind of theory of everything, promoted, for instance, by Wilson (1998) and Dawkins.

215 “If there is a human moral to be drawn, it is that we must teach our children altruism, for we cannot expect it to be part of their biological nature.” Dawkins 2016, 181. As cited above, at the end of his work, Dawkins argues that although we are gene and meme machines, “we have the power to turn against our creators.” Dawkins 2016, 260.
distinguished: it should be recognised, for example, that the Darwinian idea of continuity in capabilities cannot be equated with the genetic reduction of morality. The latter would rule out much of the traditional meaning of responsibility, while the former does not imply determinism.

Evolutionary ethics can, roughly put, defend either reductionism or non-reductionism concerning moral actions. Reductionist explanations of moral traits hold them to directly result from survival-oriented natural selection. Despite the fact that the non-reductionist explanation is often connected with the defence of the non-naturalness of genuine moral traits, also other interpretations are possible. The intimate relationship between philosophical anthropology and the natural sciences encourages questioning whether the concept of moral agency can require non-natural capacity from a human being. According to sociobiology, the human species has evolved into a species consisting of beings that cooperate through morality. This is a unique system that may even internally motivate altruist action as it connects people emotionally with each other. As this system of morality takes place for the sake of genetic survival of the species, my moral motivations are in line with my, perhaps unconscious, egoist inclinations: to be moral for the sake of my genetic progress.216

Wilson also believes that all social behaviour – ethics included – ultimately works for evolutionary progress: humanity is generated to improve genetic survival.217 Whether this commits the fallacy and violates Hume’s “no is from ought” is debated even among evolutionary ethicists.218 Quite many doubt whether the strict separation between emotion-motivated “quasi-moral” behaviour (which can be observed even in some primates) and exceptionally human reason-based, “genuine” moral behaviour is valid. Considering the conditions of the fallacy statement might be helpful here. For a modernist view, natural “is” represents as a concept some objective, causally determined facts, while moral “ought” represents norms set by the free legislative will, derived from the subjective attitudes of one (possibly divine) or many subjects.219 According to Kant, moral reasoning is free from all determination which qualifies the concept of nature.220 This easily amounts to the interpretation that moral reasoning

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216 Wilson and Ruse argue for the instrumental role of morality in the evolutionary epic. “[T]he way our biology enforces its ends is by making us think that there is an objective higher code, to which we are subject. […] If this perception of human evolution is correct, it provides a new basis for moral reasoning. Ethics is seen to have a solid foundation, not in divine guidance or pure moral imperatives, but in the shared qualities of human nature and the desperate need for reciprocity.” Ruse & Wilson 1989, 316. See also Ruse 1999, 176. Ruse calls this a “lucky fake”.


219 In order to understand this modern ethos in the current context of environmental issues, it is necessary to understand the ethos of modern science and technology, and the instrumental role of knowledge included in that. Historically speaking, objectivity of the external factual truths was adopted into modern ethics, perhaps most notably from Descartes, and freedom of moral reasoning from the laws of nature and determined human conditions was emphasised especially by Kant. See, for instance, Werner Pluhar’s Introduction in Kant’s Critique of Judgment, Kant 1987, 35.

220 Kant connects the dichotomy between is and ought most clearly with the categories of determinism and freedom, which clearly makes them two aspects of the human agent. For Kant, the laws of nature are “laws according to which everything happens; those of [freedom] are laws according to which everything ought to happen”. Kant 1990, 3-4.
must not be anything naturally explainable: moral autonomy as the freedom of a legislator belongs to the non-natural sphere. But autonomy as radical freedom is only possible in comparison with the world of objective, determined facts. Otherwise, the idea of practising autonomy becomes more complicated.221

Choosing between the continuity thesis with an optimist view of human nature and the discontinuity thesis with a pessimist view of human nature also influences what is considered to motivate people to act morally or care about being moral. For the continuity thesis, moral capacities can be naturally motivated. People may construct cultural structures as they are inclined to enjoy cultivating their moral capabilities and increase their flourishing through moral action. But even if human nature is determined by selfish genes, cultural development, capable of resisting selfishness, may still motivate people through their selfish emotions. Hobbes’s classical externalist argument states that people are totally selfish, and they want to satisfy their desires to the maximum extent. But as they are rational, natural desires motivate them to seek for peace, security and freedom, which can only be realised by a commodious life.222 For personal commitment to morality, however, this type of motivation offers weak justification. Whether an evolutionary approach to motivation is internalist or externalist depends on its attitude to natural selfishness.223

2.3.4 ETHICS EXPLAINED NATURALLY

A distinguishing feature of evolutionary theorists concerns whether they think that genuine moral behaviour – namely actions that cannot be reduced to evolutionary profitability – originates in nature or not. While Darwinians highlight the continuity between natural and moral behaviour, some others, such as Huxley’s followers, argue that natural behaviour must be genetically profitable, and therefore, non-profitable actions must be grounded on non-natural aspects in human culture and free will. The Darwinian thesis that genuine morality has its origin in nature is currently the dominant one:224 human agents are moral animals and the difference is “one of degree and not of kind”.225 Human morality is thus seen as a product of natural social evolution, “a direct outgrowth of the social instincts that we share with other animals”,226 or “a form of inquiry in which innovators recognize and respond to external constraints”.227 Emergence of genuine moral reasons has to do with adaptation somehow, and animal social tendencies are the building blocks for

221 Evolutionary psychology denies the crude separation of cultural moral codes from profitable issues: evolutionary profitability can well explain cultural innovations such as expressions of morality. Whether this represents naturalist moral realism or expressivism is a question about whether “the codes of evolved brains” are considered normative or not.

222 Ruse argues that social contract theory, such as John Rawls’s, and the modern version of the Darwinian view coincide. Ruse 1995, 244-5.

223 While internalism claims that rational moral reasons are convincing and motivating, externalism argues that motivation depends on other, contingent things. For the naturalists’ and rationalists’ views about moral motivation, see Brink 1989, 46-7, 49.

224 Kirkman 2007.


226 De Waal 2006, 6.

227 Kitcher 2011, 204.
moral agency.228 Evolutionary theorising that focuses on human agency can, therefore, explain moral motivation and even morality as a phenomenon. A natural continuity between animal altruism and human morality is, in any case, recognised.229

The other group of explanations that has its origins in Thomas Henry Huxley's theory distinguishes between nature and morality as a cultural innovation.230 For Huxley and his followers, the discontinuity between evolutionary and cultural reasons should be kept clear, and morality, as an issue of reasoning, must be separated from evolved, and therefore selfish, emotions. If there are reasons for genuinely altruistic actions, their origin must be in cultural adaptation rather than nature: we have culturally developed social codes in order to survive. Hence, morality is a device for selfish beings to promote their fitness. But the dichotomy between nature and culture is striking. According to this explanation, defended, for example, by Richard Dawkins, we are lucky to have morality due to our ancestors, who became moral by the power of their non-natural choice.231

The metaethical implications of Huxley's and Dawkins's view are that evolutionary theorising either disproves all foundations of ethics – which is called an evolutionary debunking argument – or ethics must have non-natural foundations in culture or religions that have emancipated humans from genetic selfishness.232 Most often the evolutionary explanation is seen to reveal the groundlessness of ethics: moral reasons are seen as fakes.233 But some argue that objective moral codes exist due to an evolved rationality shared by moral beings: objectivity arises from the need of social animals to justify their actions to others. If ethical realism is defended, it is conceived non-naturally.234 According to critics, this interpretation of evolutionary explanation implies a narrow conception of evolution and discontinuity between physiological evolution and the human psyche or mind: mechanisms of biological and social adaptation never cooperate. The conception of human nature is both pessimistic and dualistic. Humans are by nature necessarily selfish, and if there is morality, it is "presented as a thin crust underneath of which boil antisocial, amoral, and egoistic passions".235 There needs to be a culturally evolved morality, like a

228 Kitcher 2007, 173-174. The claim is supported by empirical evidence of primate behaviour and psychology, but also cultural anthropology. de Waal 2006, 22; Westermark 1917. As a primatologist, de Waal has gathered evidence about the proto-moral abilities of our siblings. See de Waal 1996 and de Waal 2005.

229 See, e.g. Ruse 1998, 2004, Kitcher 2007, 2011. This view was underrated and even disdained by philosophers for a long time because it was used politically to justify racism and eugenics. In the current discussion, however, it has been widely shown to be a misleading conclusion from the Darwinian approach. See, for instance, Richard Weikart, From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany (New York: Macmillan 2004).

230 Huxley 2009, xxv-xxxiv. By referring to Stoics and Indian religions, he argues that ethics is opposed to the natural cosmic process: "[T]he practice of that which is ethically best – what we call goodness or virtue – involves a course of conduct, which in all respects, is opposed to that which leads to success in the cosmic struggle for existence." Huxley 2009, 81-2.


233 Especially natural law ethics and Kantian transcendental idealism are seen to lack foundations.

234 In principle, it seems possible to combine this with religiously motivated divine command theory: if there were a God, he could order us to behave altruistically. In that case, however, both the moral knowledge and motivation to act in accordance with such an order would have an external origin.

235 According to Huxley's view, human beings are partly natural and partly cultural beings, and these elements are only externally interlinked. Huxley 1989 [1894] cited in de Waal 2006, 6, 10.
“veneer” upon human nature, that makes humans capable of getting beyond natural selfishness.236

In contrast to this, the Darwinian view of human nature is optimistic: since human beings are first and foremost social animals, a human moral capacity has evolved to guide them in social conflicts. But while some argue that actions in accordance with evolved moral emotions as such could be called moral,237 some others think that they convey objective moral imperatives by functioning like moral intuitions in Kantian ethics.238 But again, some others conceptually separate moral conducts and natural good, and only stress the earthly nature of ethics through the human perspective: since humans are mutually dependent, evolved predispositions and the moral system protect our species-specific natural goods.239 Different adaptational explanations lead to different metaethical positions among the Darwinian views, and both naturalism and non-naturalism about moral facts can be defended. Most usually morality in a Darwinian approach is connected with natural fellow-feelings: Emotionally grounded action can be, due to our psychological structures, genuinely altruistic.

Answers to the question “Why should I be moral?” are connected with the question whether the idea of moral agency is separated from the idea of human nature or not. Moral naturalism drawing from an evolutionary approach calls for not separating moral reasoning from the normative forces that motivate action. This means that if humans are individual egoists by nature, morality can internally motivate action only when it underpins one’s rational interests. Usually they are considered to be selfish, but not necessarily. Natural rational interests rely on one’s self-understanding and identity as an agent. There can also be external reasons for altruism, but they are less confident, as they are generated by fear of external punishment. Many philosophers argue that natural egoist reasons are not the reasons of a moral agent, however rational they would be: autonomous moral agency requires acting for reasons of its own type.240 Moral reasons entailing a moral act should be non-natural. The social self-understanding of the agent challenges the egoism of moral naturalism from another angle: understanding humans as natural altruists by nature, inclined to seek non-selfish aims, makes the motivation more confident. But the metaethical questions remain: are reasons to act morally (altruistically) then moral reasons? Is altruism morally motivated if agents are naturally social and their innate instincts make them inclined to be altruistic? According to the common answer, natural sociality may explain morality as a phenomenon but cannot justify norms. The usual conclusion is that contingent nature is irrelevant for norms, which can only be followed by choice of will, which is necessary for moral motivation. The source of normativity cannot be equated with the source of natural inclinations.

236 De Waal uses the idea of “veneer theory” to criticise Huxley and Dawkins on the base of empirical evidence about the continuity of moral emotions among social animals. De Waal 2006, 7-12.

237 Westermak 1917, 738-9. Evolutionary psychologists argue that humans are, by nature, necessarily moral beings. See Barkow, Cosmides & Tooby 1992; Cosmides & Tooby 2013.

238 For example, Jonathan Haidt, Robert Wright and Frans de Waal can be counted as intuitionists. See, Haidt 2001; Wright 1994; de Waal 2006.

239 Foot 2001, Kitcher 2011, 2013. De Waal 2005, 54: “[B]iology holds us ‘on a leash’ and will let us stray only so far from who we are. We can design our life any way we want, but whether we will thrive depends on how well the life fits human predispositions.”

240 Nielsen 1972, 541-43.
However, a wide range of recent philosophical discussions calls into question the idea of a strictly separated will indicating moral autonomy. Such an idea often presumes a modernist, individualist and dualistically split view of the agent. Debate over the primary role of motivation and reason implies that the capacities of an agent are split into natural and non-natural types: the willing agent is isolated from the natural one. This refers to the question of whether will is, in fact, free from reasoning, which was the debate at the dawn of *via moderna*. Or should the possible freedom of intention be located in the complex process in which reasoning and will are both involved. The evolutionary approach to social codes seems suspect about such a separation and gains support from empirical social sciences. Sociologist Émile Durkheim, for instance, criticises Kant for separating the logical structure and the normative force of ethics: it makes normative force extrinsic to the very idea of morality. According to Durkheim, Kant’s philosophical anthropology is thus an anthropology of a “double man”.\(^{241}\) Whatever we think about Durkheim’s argument, it is worth acknowledging that the separation of logical structure and normative force may cause an anthropological side effect that cognitive moral processes, namely rationality, are separated from the emotional processes carrying motivational power.

The reduction of moral capacities to innate social instincts should not be equated with the reductive notion of moral reasons for action. Despite the fact that evolutionary explanations are often taken to support ethical reductionism, all explanations are not reductionist. According to non-reductionist naturalist explanations of morality, the simple survival mechanisms of natural selection are not enough to explain morality: morality refers to fundamental sacrifice, giving without hope of reward.\(^{242}\) Although genetic selection is among the explanations of the origins of morality, morality as a phenomenon cannot be reduced to it. Even freedom can be defended without denying that all major human motives are innate in the sense that they are not separable from natural reasons.\(^{243}\) According to Mary Midgley, Darwin was not actually a reductionist. Therefore, she argues, the strict Humean dichotomy between prescriptive and descriptive should be rejected.\(^{244}\) Midgley attacks the idea of “an antisceptically isolated human essence, a purely spiritual or intellectual pilot arbitrarily set in a physical vehicle which plays no part in his or her motivation”. But she also claims that “we surely must reject the crude, mechanistic, reductive accounts of motive [...] and the fatalism that goes with them”.\(^{245}\)

In a way, Michael Ruse also agrees that Darwinism does not deny an obligation to try to be autonomous and altruistic – although he believes that human behaviour always remains determined.\(^{246}\) According to Ruse, a degree of autonomy is essential for a self-corrective mechanism in the second-order level of altruism, but it can be presupposed to be an evolutionary demand.\(^{247}\) The interesting feature in Ruse’s view

\(^{242}\) See Midgley 1979; Waller 2003, 541.
\(^{243}\) Midgley 1984, 74.
\(^{244}\) Midgley 1994, 145.
\(^{245}\) Midgley 1994, 159.
\(^{246}\) Ruse 1998, 214, 258.
\(^{247}\) Ruse 2001, 212-5. echoes Daniel Dennett who states: "Far from it being the case that we are completely under the control of our ancestors or our evolutionary past, it is rather the case that that
is—despite its metaethical reductionism—that it emphasises the role of moral agency in evolution. Human cultural practices and actual moral conduct are not meaningless in the course of biological evolution.\textsuperscript{248} The capacity of being a moral agent combines natural causalities, moral inclinations and, through imagination, orientations based on the hope of something not yet realised. Together they influence the future adaptations of moral agents, and thus determine the innate motives of future humans. This refers to moral agency as an evolving issue that can be actively enhanced or degenerated.

Naturalist explanations of morality are alternatives on offer for environmental ethicists to prevent an exceptional human agency that presumes non-natural autonomy governed by absolute freedom, but the reductionist explanations are not widely defended. Instead, a more relational approach would fit better for them. There are at least two ways to formulate softened explanations of the moral autonomy of actions: by considering actions as relatively free, due to the complexity of operations by which they are generated, or by considering responsibility as not requiring absolute freedom.\textsuperscript{249} A notable number of philosophers criticise the absoluteness of the gap between freedom and nature (and the derived operations of will and reasoning), which has dominated moral philosophy largely due to Kant’s influence, and has been defended by both empiricist and rationalist humanists.\textsuperscript{250} The basic modernist presuppositions unquestioned in the Enlightenment tradition, such as Kantianism, have recently become increasingly questioned—and not only by philosophers but also by empirical scientists: it is not, in fact, a plausible view about the operations of agency from the empirical point of view.

This is, I argue, an important reason to raise a critical question about the self-understanding of ethics. It is especially problematic for environmental ethics that philosophical argumentation maintains factual presuppositions about the human agents that are suspicious in the light of the empirical sciences. Environmental ethics cannot sustain science scepticism without being self-contradictory.

The evolutionary origins of traits and dispositions associated with altruism and cooperation can be scientifically investigated as empirical phenomena, and much can also be explained. The problem, however, arises when moving from explaining phenomena to explaining particular exercises of moral capacities: it requires clarifying the relationship between causal adaptations and reason-giving explanations. Complications in moving from one type of explanation to another elucidate the problems included in attempts of evolutionary debunking arguments to

heritage has tended to set us up as self-controllers—lucky us”, Ruse quoting Daniel Dennett, Elbow Room (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984), 72.

\textsuperscript{248} Ruse refers, for instance, to medical science that has altered natural selection. Ruse 1985, 210.

\textsuperscript{249} For examples, see Midgley 1984; Kirkman 2009; Waller 2003. Midgley defends a view that combines a certain type of freedom with evolved moral motives. Kirkman’s Darwinian humanism seeks to combine Humean empiricism with Kantianism in a way that the tension between freedom and nature in moral action does not totally disappear. Bruce Waller thinks that the conceptual distinction between individual freedom and moral responsibility might solve the problem of compatibility. Regardless of the validity of Waller’s claim, it seems convincing that the juxtaposition between freedom and evolutive nature represents an underestimation of the complexity of the mental operations and interactions that take place in moral deliberation and action.

\textsuperscript{250} Some environmental philosophers attempt to dispel the distinction by appeal to teleology, while others criticise such unification as essentialist. Kirkman 2009, 218, 219, 233-34.
reduce ethics to evolutionary biology or psychology. Some questions are worth asking in order to clarify the conceptual map when talking about evolutionary explanations of the mechanisms of moral reasoning. First, a set of questions concerns the explanation of moral reason: Does evolutionary theorising explain a) moral reasoning, b) reasons for acting morally, or c) moral reasons? A second set concerns the conceptual reducibility of morality: Does a positive answer to the explanatory questions imply a) that the moral reasons are reducible to the explanations, which would mean that ethics is not autonomous, b) that the truth-aptness of moral concepts is reducible to the explanatory facts, which would rule out the authority of ethics, or c) that the normativity of moral reasons is reducible to the explanatory, say, psychological facts, which would rule out the idea of normativity. The philosophical implications vary in accordance with the answers. For example, arguments that derive the truth value of moral concepts from natural facts represent naturalism, but arguments for reducing the normative authority of moral reasons to evolutionary factual explanations “debunk” ethics. Debunking arguments renounce the autonomy of ethics: it is reduced to empirical science.

Quite a number of evolutionary ethicists argue that not only moral senses, but also moral conduct and manifestations of current morality, are adaptively explainable. Some even claim that the reliability of moral codes can be justified on evolutionary grounds. Elliot Sober and David Sloan Wilson, for example, argue that evolution provided altruism, which is thus coded in the agent’s psychological capacities besides egoist and hedonist motivations. Metaethically, evolutionary psychology is usually used in arguments against moral realism. The justificatory status of moral beliefs can become undermined by an appeal to empiric explanations of beliefs (like the one derived from evolutionary genealogy) or of the epistemic contents of the psychological processes leading to a belief. In this sense, evolutionary explanations undermine moral realism – at least in its robust sense. However, use of the evolutionary genealogy of moral dispositions and reasoning does not necessarily imply debunking arguments or not even modest forms of agential realism, as I shall argue. On the contrary, it can offer valuable tools to revise modernist presuppositions about the moral agent and processes of moral reasoning implicated in modern ethics, and to reconsider the idea and role of the material environment in moral realism. Science can, I claim, serve conceptual clarification of moral philosophy.

One of the decisive questions whether naturalist explanations debunk moral realism or not, concerns the nature of moral agency and its role in the theory of

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251 FitzPatrick 2017, 2-8.
252 I shall return to the philosophical relevance of evolutionary explanations in chapter 4.
254 Some argue that general moral senses are innate, while particular moral codes are culturally constructed. See, for example, Mark Hauser Moral Minds: The Nature of Right and Wrong (New York: HarperCollins 2006). According to Hauser, the “universal moral grammar” is a distinct property of human brains. The evolved moral capacity is thus organic in the human mind. But it offers only general moral “insights” and principles, while proper codes are relative to culture.
255 For the main types of debunking arguments, see Nichols 2015, 97-118 and FitzPatrick 2015. It is not possible to go into details about this rapidly increasing discussion, but I shall return to some points in chapter 4.
ethics. Linking moral reasons or the truth value of moral concepts to the nature of the moral agent is nothing new. Together with other versions of naturalism, such as Aristotelian agent-based virtue ethics, evolutionary approaches to realist ethics face the question: What makes natural reasons normative for the agent? While traditional Aristotelian naturalism dissolves the problem by essential humanness, evolutionary naturalism allows for particular contingences of nature as constitutive for the actualised types of humanness and the reliable manifestations of virtue.

In this section, a distinguishing feature among evolutionary ethicists appeared to be their attitude to the genuine naturalness of morality. Positions differed with regard to the Darwinian idea of a continuum between animal and human agencies. According to the Darwinian view, then, although the processes for moral reasoning are complex, they do not require non-natural agency. In contrast to this, authors following Huxley’s view argue that moral ability is a non-natural addition by culture. It was argued that naturalist Darwinians are more inclined to carefully scrutinise the nature of the processes that decisively constitute moral reasoning and actions, and to defend non-reductionist explanations of the freedom and autonomy. The view of isolated moral agency that has been eagerly defended in modern ethics seems unnecessary and scientifically implausible, but this does not imply the reduction of agency into causal determinism. Instead, the processes of nature themselves are far more complex than generally thought in modern philosophy. I argue that this fact has not been recognised in ethics as widely as it should be. I shall return to this issue in chapter 3.

2.4 MORAL AGENCY IN FEMINIST ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS – A CONSTRAINED CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH

2.4.1 ECOFEMINISM AS ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY AND FEMINIST ETHICS

Feminist constructivism offers another framework for environmental ethics to formulate alternative approaches to human agency. Philosophically speaking, evolutionary naturalism and feminist constructivism oppose each other with regard to the concept of human nature and moral agency. Naturalist approaches, such as evolutionary psychology, seek objective nature-based truths about being human, whereas feminist approaches deny absolute meanings and universally shared concepts about human nature. In ethics, to put it roughly, naturalist conceptions usually imply an understanding of moral conducts either as conventions based on (empirically verified) natural psychological needs and structures of human agents (e.g. the Humean approach) or on some essentialist theory of human nature (e.g. the Aristotelian approach). In contrast to this, understanding human nature as socially

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256 I shall go further into this issue in chapter 3.
constructed implies a rejection of any natural or universally shared foundation for normative concepts or conducts, and instead rests on cultural practices of care and love on the one hand (such as some spiritual and religious approaches and pragmatism, for example), and on the methods of discourse and political life on the other (e.g. approaches by Rawls and Habermas). However, as I shall argue, despite the fact that the framework for ecofeminism is found in mainstream feminist philosophy, ecofeminist approaches to human agency mainly attempt to formulate a conceptually modest version of constructionism, called here constrained constructionism. Constrained mode of constructionism concerns both the concepts of nature, human nature (including gender concepts) and moral agent, and the nature of moral reasons. Therefore, I believe that it has potentiality to alleviate the contradiction between the two approaches to human moral life, and even soften the philosophical juxtaposition in an interesting way.258

Ecofeminism stands at the crossroads of feminist philosophy and environmental ethics. As a type of environmental ethics ecofeminism is typically classified as a variant of radical ecophilosophy because it questions the modernist conceptual role of the relationships between human and nonhuman others. Ecofeminists widely share the view that distortion is implicitly interwoven into the concepts of convenient ethical framework, which is incapable of holding nonhuman objects as morally demanding and providing sound arguments for sustainable relationships. Ecofeminism259 differs from non-feminist contextual environmental ethics especially by widely held idea of twin domination that makes a conceptual connection between the subordination of nature and the subordination of women.260 There are various interpretations about the interconnection between women and nature and how the twin oppressions are to be overcome.261 A widely held view in ecofeminism is to think that supremacy over nature and inequality between sexes, races, and social classes have common roots in dominant Western structures of thought that follow “the logic

258 For more details on the implications, see chapter 4.
259 Sometimes also called ecological feminism. Chris Cuomo introduced the term in order to separate philosophical activity from those ecofeminist writings that are closely linked with some religious and spiritual interests that have been popular. Despite the fact that I here refer to ecofeminism only as a philosophical approach, I use ecological feminism and ecofeminism as synonyms, following Karen Warren. See Warren 2000, 53. It is worth noting that ecological in the context of ecological feminism refers not only to the ecosystems in the sense of ecology science, but it is also used as a philosophical concept that often covers social relationships and cultural contextuality. A similar conceptual definition also holds for many others approaches that talk about ecological ethics.
260 Ecofeminists differ, however, on the question whether exploitation of nonhuman nature and oppression of human others are allies because of their (real?) connection, or parallel expressions of the same similar mechanisms adopted in the political culture. I shall here concentrate on the latter, which is, in my view, a philosophically more interesting and relevant partner in the wider discussion. As also a famous environmental philosopher James P. Sterba states: “This is the type of ecofeminism [...] that does not appeal to groundlessness – but rather seeks to ground ecofeminism in a widespread rejection of forms of domination.” Karen Warren is among the clearest defenders of this interpretation, and as Sterba says is “clearly the recognized champion of this form of ecofeminist philosophy”. Sterba 2002, 37.
261 Karen Warren describes different interpretations of interconnections between women and nonhuman nature in Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters. She distinguishes between stressing the nature of interconnections as historical, conceptual, empirical, socioeconomic, linguistic, symbolic, spiritual, epistemological, political and ethical. These interpretations of course intersect with each other, and one can stress more than one of them. Warren 2000, 22-38.
of domination." 262 This logic generates subordination by means of conceptual dualisms common in Western structures of thought (e.g. reason and emotion, culture and nature, mind and body). 263

As feminist and environmental ethicists are seen as allies in their struggle against this logic of domination, ecofeminist projects widely share methodologies and discussions with mainstream feminists. However, the social constructionist idea of the human self as a moral agent has been the topic of debates between ecofeminists and other feminists, mainly because of the different roles they give to material and ecological partners in the construction of moral identities. The basis for feminist critique of the mainstream concept of the self is in descriptions of woman as the Other (non-subject, non-person, non-agent or body), 264 which indicates not only subordination of women’s selfhood, but also distorts the view of ethics. In contrast to the mainstream modern understanding of the moral self as a free, autonomous and rational person isolated from particularities, relationships and a wider social arena, feminist promote a wider perspective to moral selves. They claim that moral selves are embodied and embedded, not totally free, nor autonomous. Freedom is an aim rather than a prerequisite. By giving voice to the experiences of women and other oppressed groups as moral selves and agents they will be emancipated. 265

Ecofeminism represents a specific project among feminist philosophies. However, in contrast to one of the standard feminist strategies for overcoming dominant patriarchal culture by liberating women from being linked with nature, 266 ecofeminists argue that the solution should not be to see the “other” as “similar” to those who have power. That would shift the problem but maintain the conceptual dualism. 267 Assimilation among people just strengthens the isolation of human individuals from their own material surroundings and from nonhuman others. Patriarchal structures cannot be removed by giving domination to women, but by

262 Warren 2000, 47-56. The concept is launched by Karen Warren, but the idea has been quite widely adopted. By highlighting structures of domination as fixed “logic” ecofeminists refer especially to the logic that parallels the oppression of certain people and nonhuman entities. Because the concept is an issue of logic, neither mode of domination can be refuted without refuting the other modes. See also Plumwood 1993, 55-9; Mellor 1997, 115, Hekman 1999, 110-13.

263 For discussion on reason versus emotion in environmental ethics, see e.g. Kheel 2007, 45-53.

264 The idea originated in Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex (1949).

265 The dominant views of the self in Western moral philosophy have their roots either in the Kantian idea of the ethical subject or in the concept of homo economicus. The Kantian self aims at surpassing all particular and cultural perspectives to achieve absolute norms, while the economic self aims at constructing rules that maximise satisfaction. Meyers 2000, 12, 16.

266 Two different approaches to ecofeminism can, however, be distinguished here. (1) Since the historical fact that cultures identifying the earth with a nurturing mother have protected the earth from destructive domination, some ecofeminists argue that this identification is not a problem as such, but rather the contents and meanings included, as well as the devaluation of the identification, can be. Merchant 1993, 270-71, 276; Suutala 2001, 30-1. (2) Some other ecofeminists argue that using this link as a positive force in the struggle for ecologically sound and humanly fair relationships is suspect. Associating femininity with nature emphasises, in fact, the patriarchal idea of motherhood: “mother as idealized, the perfectly round globe-breast; mother as mysterious, shrouded in cloud; mother as ambivalent love-object, abandoned up in space” (Roach 1996, 56-7). And besides this, by identification nature becomes over-personified, while still remaining a lifeless machine from the other side. Catherine Roach, for example, argues that as long as the linkage goes together with the view of nature as a resource, both women and nature will suffer from abuse.

267 The “antagonistic relationship that […] exists between the two divided and hierarchically ordered parts” would remain in that kind of strategy. Rather, “an ecofeminist perspective propounds the need for […] a new anthropology which recognizes that life in nature (which includes human beings) is maintained by means of co-operation, and mutual care and love.” Mies & Shiva 1993, 5-19.
strengthening the recognition, connectedness and appreciation of otherness – whether it is experienced as body, the physical world, other human beings or animals. New insights, modified by the disvalued groups themselves, are needed. Women should not be drawn further from nature, but rather, men should be drawn closer to it. Carolyn Merchant argues in The Death of Nature (1980) that the metaphors which connect women to nature are significantly the same as those by which nature is subordinated in culture. Merchant’s twin domination argument was influential for early ecofeminists. Although claims for a historical or causal link between male-centred thinking and environmental destruction cannot be verified, some weaker connection and derived justification of this domination is easily proven, at least in Western societies.

Besides its explanatory task, ecofeminist philosophy aims at changing cultural values and political practices that have been patriarchal in their structures and thus oppressive in practice. The specific ecofeminist criticism against the traditional moral culture is targeted at the foundational exclusiveness of its structure. This view was put forward in Marilyn Freye’s The Politics of Reality, in which she describes the traditional approach to ethics as “the arrogant perception”, in contrast to “the loving perception”. The structural failure of the arrogant perception is that it “presupposes and maintains sameness in such a way that it expands the moral community only to those beings who are thought to resemble (be like, similar to, or the same as) ‘us’ in some morally significant way”. Therefore, it “builds a moral hierarchy of beings and assumes some common denomination of moral considerability by virtue of which like beings deserve similar treatment or moral consideration and unlike beings do not”. A problem for this kind of ethics lies in its exclusiveness: qualifications for morally significant others are base on some similarity that is needed in order to mark out the individuals that belong to the moral others. The emphasis on moral standing focuses on the demarcation of insiders from outsiders, members of a “club” from non-members.

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268 Though not necessary, this is often connected with indigenous wisdom and religious traditions. For example, the Finnish ecofeminist, Kaarina Kailo argues that “we need to return our collective consciousness to the values and worldview of radically ecologically sustainable interconnectedness, the good circle and mode of life that appreciates traditional ecological knowledge, oral stories, herbal medicine and grassroots healing, the natural rhythms of nature, local food production, ceremonial life, the arts, and rituals aimed at consolidating mutuality and eco-friendly living.” Kailo 2013, 6.

269 Merchant 1993, 2-4.

270 According to Merchant, in Western history, the dominant metaphors about nature have identified nature with two feminine metaphors: a nurturing mother and a wild, uncontrollable, dangerous female. In her view, premodern organic cosmology highlighted the first, while with the mechanistic revolution, and especially Francis Bacon’s philosophy, the metaphor of the nurturing mother vanished and more room was given to the metaphor of wild disorder. This, she argues, gave birth to the modern strive for power over the nature. Merchant 1993, 270-73. Val Plumwood criticises Merchant’s historical accuracy. According to Plumwood, the origins of twin domination can already be found in classical Greek philosophy, especially in the rationalist tradition. Value dualisms between masculine/feminine, reason/emotion or spirit/body stress the link between ideal humanness and men: anthropocentrism and androcentrism are strongly connected. Plumwood 1996.


273 Birch 1993, 315-17. As for ecofeminists, the reason for revising the concept of the self also lies in the imbalance caused by the dominant view of the environment. Ecofeminists do not focus on reconceptualising those considered as “Others” (women, non-human beings) but on reconceptualising the noble “One”, the agent and his reasons for moral action. In this sense, ecofeminism has turned away
Human agents with the ability to make such definitions thus have power over the status of others, which makes the whole question of morally considerable others “imperialistic” and ethically problematic. According to ecofeminism, the oppression of women and exploitative subordination of nonhuman nature abide by the same damaging logic, in which the relationship between the “agent” and the “other” is that between the conqueror and the conquered. The dominators not only have power, they also believe that their power is justified. Practising this logic implies its own justification and, therefore, alternative logics cannot emerge within such practises. The way out of such a logic requires reconceptualisation of the powerful self, the agent, as well as the sources of his “justified” power. Concerning the political aspect of the ecofeminist project, the question is whether the political and the philosophical projects can be separated.\(^{274}\) In any case, without renewing the patriarchal view of the human agent it is impossible to formulate sustainable relationships between human and nonhuman nature.\(^{275}\)

Although ecofeminists highlight the shared aims of ecological and feminist ethics, which are seen as parallel in their cultural critic,\(^{276}\) the most rigid criticism against ecofeminism comes from feminist philosophers, who criticise the meaning of the material and biological features and relationships for the agents that is seen behind the argument of twin domination.\(^{277}\) A typical anti-essentialist argument insists that the suppositions that women are “closer” to nature depict an essential female nature, and hence, replicate damaging conceptions.\(^{278}\) According to ecofeminists, anti-essentialist criticism is mainly misleading, though the question also divides ecofeminists. The question is whether the link between women and nature should be seen to imply that women’s experiences should be privileged in epistemic or moral knowledge construction for sustainable ecological ethics and politics, or not. The line closer to conceptual naturalism stresses the privileged position of the oppressed in

\(^{274}\) See, for example, Mies & Shiva 1993. For politically oriented ecofeminism, see also Salleh 1997. Ecofeminists often consider, however, that the political aspects are inseparable from the background philosophical assumptions concerning, for instance knowledge and basic cultural experiences. For conceptually oriented ecofeminism, see Plumwood (e.g. 1993) and especially Warren (e.g. 2000). About the interrelation between political and conceptual approaches, see Warren 2000, 207, 211.

\(^{275}\) Cuomo 1998, 61. The feature in ecofeminism that conceptual understanding of the agency is seen to play a central role in the efficiency of environmental ethics makes the approach, in my view, particularly interesting.

\(^{276}\) The struggle against the “logic of domination” makes ecological and feminist ethics allies, and they may benefit from each other especially in conceptual criticism, the reconceptualisation of cultural self-understanding in order to eliminate domination, and in their political agendas. Warren 2000, 47-56.

\(^{277}\) Victoria Davion, for example, argues that if ecofeminism does not reject all biology-linked notions, such as ‘the female’ and ‘the feminine’ stick to anti-feminist universal concepts, even if universalism, biological determinism and conceptual essentialism are rejected. See Davion 1994.

\(^{278}\) According to Chris Cuomo’s description, anti-essentialist arguments claim that “statements like ‘Women are closer to nature than men’ attribute essential features to women and, worse, rely on the notion that there is an essential female nature. Hence, they replicate exactly those false conceptions of woman’s essential nature that have been most damaging (such statements also attribute an essence to Nature, which is also a social construct, and to Man).” The problem of essentialism in ecofeminism can be located in the “false universalization of certain conceptions of ‘woman,’ and a lack of attention to the diversity of women’s experiences”. Such problems result from over-generalisation based on the “tendency to aspire to the (fallacious) objective view from nowhere”, with which Western academic feminist theorists are also practically much engaged. Cuomo 1998, 112, 114, 117.
the moral discourse, whereas the other line highlights that women and nature form a conceptual community of fate under oppressive conceptual structures. Both lines of thought highlight that the exclusion of material or biological issues originates in the same oppressive logic as those lines of thought against which the projects of feminism are targeted. Conversely, any environmental ethics that does not take the twin domination of women and nature seriously, cannot prosper.

A question for ecofeminism thus is whether the damaging identification between women and nature – which has been a historical fact – can be used positively in order to overcome oppressive structures, or whether the strategy should be to liberate women and nature by rejecting the image of that linkage as sexist biological reduction. But both the strategy of making use of women’s ecological wisdom and the strategy of liberating women by deconstructing the links between women and nature, implicitly presuppose culture-nature dualism. Therefore, recent ecofeminists are not so much interested about the question whether women are “closer to nature” than men, but rather about uncovering what kind of conceptual framework makes this question relevant, and what are the problems of conceptualisation behind the question. In such a framework, features representing the “natural” are excluded from or devalued in whoever’s agency (women’s or men’s alike) agency. The features required for ideal human agency are seen to be isolated from, or even opposed to, material issues. Humans are, however, embodied, and bodies are biological, sexual and ecologically contextual – besides being something else.

At least three strategies are used by feminist environmentalists to overcome the oppressive conceptual frameworks. The first strategy embraces the biological, bodily and ecological conditions as essential factors for the epistemic and moral agent. Advocates of this strategy are most opposed to traditional social feminism and the extreme deconstructivism it often includes. According to ecofeminists, sustainable gender equality cannot be achieved by focusing on elevating the

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279 Ariel Salleh, for example, thinks that women’s specific bodily experiences give them a kind of relationship with nature that is not possible for men. She considers that biological and social gender differences heavily influence the consciousness of people. According to Salleh, the feminist contribution to environmental ethics is to value the “different way of knowing” that women’s type of consciousness can offer. Salleh 1997, 39, 323.
280 Warren 2000, 62; Warren 1996, 19. Warren’s position is strong. She claims that without taking seriously the twin and interconnected dominations of women and nature, no environmental ethics can be adequate or satisfying. She provides careful arguments for this position. See Warren 1996.
281 The view that stresses the value of women’s identification with nature is most strongly supported by those who support Goddess spirituality.
282 Women’s ecological wisdom is seen to emerge either from the real differences between the consciousness of different genders, or from the historical fact that women have been treated more like animals, which has influenced their understanding of nature.
283 Ecofeminists quite widely think that identification of the feminine with the natural is a constructed idea that expresses a dualistic argument. Another expression of the same argument is the belief that rationality is connected to certain masculine features. Therefore, such identifications are usually seen as useless in ethics. For example, Plumwood 1994, 33.
284 For this reason, it seems justified, according to many ecofeminists, to emphasise that humans are embodied agents – even at the risk of being condemned as essentialists. Mary Mellor, for example, argues that the idea of women’s bodies and social experiences can be used in understanding the imbalance of the relations between human and nature, and in constructing a more sustainable moral culture. She seeks for a middle way between essentialism and constructivism. Mellor 1997, 178.
285 According to, for instance, Cuomo 1998, 112-140.
oppressed or focusing on the similar status of all. On the contrary, the focus should be in conceptual “diminishing” of the idealised, abstract idea of the free self, which has been elevated above the determinants of nature and other people. This strategy calls for giving epistemic priority to the experiences of those who are “closer to nature” in the construction of sustainable moral principles, for which reason it is often criticised for adopting some kind of essentialism.286 The second strategy goes together with postmodern anti-essentialist critique against the former strategy. According to the advocates of this strategy, privilege for women or indigenous people is not justified without metaphysical assumptions about nature and the human self. However, most ecofeminists criticise postmodern feminism for its simplistic interpretation of the criticised view.

There is in addition the third strategy, which does not hold material determinants and socially constructed concepts as opposites but rather as partners in the construction of the self.287 Advocates of this strategy can be called conceptual ecofeminists. They (for example Val Plumwood and Karen Warren) highlight that since the link between the domination of nature and the subordination of women is a conceptual one, so must the solution be.288 They argue, first and foremost, for an ecological conception of humanity. Instead of claiming similarity as a precondition for equality, they stress the role of diversity for both beings and values.289 Recognition of the real diversity of things and qualities is important for the good construction of the self, which is always constructed in a web of these things and qualities. Each individual agent exists as a part of her web, comes into existence by it, and constitutively influences it. Disvaluing the other determinants participating in the web (whether they represent her body, habitat, culture, or her social or ecological surrounding) might imply degeneration.

In regard to the dominant conception of a moral agent, ecofeminist criticism offers, I think, three particularly interesting points of focus. They concern (1) the diversity of moral identities, (2) criticism against the internal split of human agency, which excludes ecological relationships from the constitutive ingredients of the construction of the moral self, and (3) the moral self as a self-in-relationship. In the next three sections, I shall explore more closely ecofeminist approaches to moral agency from these three perspectives.

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286 According to Diana Meyers, for instance, since the chosen conceptions lead to unsustainable ethical and political structures, they are in a position to be replaced by metaphysically alternative concepts. Meyers 2000.

287 As this third strategy aims beyond the dichotomy between essentialism and anti-essentialism, it could also be called “strategic essentialism”. According to Chris Cuomo, for instance, strategic essentialism serves important political merits. Cuomo 1998, 124–5. Mary Mellor describes this approach to essentialism as “practically and theoretically useful”. Mellor 1997, 178.

288 According to Plumwood, subordination is based on the one hand on the polarisation integral to conceptual dualism and on the other on the fact that conceptual dualism is connected with value-dualism (reason is more valuable than emotion, etc.). Plumwood 1994, 147,153.

289 “Although diversity is not good in and of itself, […] ecological feminist theory ought to reflect the heretofore neglected diversity of women’s lives and interests. […] The second […] reason for ecological feminist valuing of diversity originates in ecological knowledge of the realities of biological interdependence, as well as commitments to justice in diverse contexts.” Cuomo 1998, 132, 134.
2.4.2 DIVERSITY, NON-DUALISM AND RELATIONALITY IN THE ECOFEMINIST CONCEPT OF AGENCY

The first perspective is directly derived from the constructionism included in most feminist approaches. According to a classical formulation of social constructionism, culturally formed interactions between individuals and their social environments are constitutive of what it is to be human. Constructionism denies any view of essential human nature. According to a classical formulation by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, “[i]n the dialectic between nature and the socially constructed world the human organism itself is transformed. In this same dialectic man produces reality and therefore produces himself.” Another classical formulation by Clifford Geertz insists that a human entity requires cultural impact in order to become fully human: being human is constituted by the culturally formed interactions between individuals and their social environments. Particular cultures, symbols and symbolic structures in each time and place shape the idea of humanness. Diversity is not something to get rid of. Humanity as a concept refers to diverse expressions of being human rather than to any universally shared idea. According to a constructionist view, each approach to humanness is shaped by a particular culture, by symbols and by historically situated semantic structures. Conceptual definitions of human beings, such as “man”, “woman” or “Arab”, do not carry universal meanings, but as constructed definitions they may carry power-related meanings, which may imply social discrimination. Conceptual differences generate oppression in social life if, and only if, we believe that some “pure, true human nature” exists. Only compared to an idea of genuine human can some manifestations of humanity be claimed to be better than some others.

Therefore, appreciation of genuine diversity stands at the core of various types of feminist ethics. Being human is constructed via interactions with different others; it is in essence being and acting in relation to different others and can never be found in isolation. Humanity only exists in modes of being human in the world. The idea of humanity, or moral agent, is not totally rejected. A possible consensus about the idea cannot, however, be based on imposed similarities between all people. Humanity as a concept consists of diverse ways of being human and is constructed in relationships that should be approved and respected as influential origins for emerging ways of being human. Ignoring fundamental diversity among beings of equal value would bring about polarisation, value-dualism and oppression. If socially formulated conceptions are held to be universal, they entail the “logic of domination”: marginal perspectives on human life become oppressed by structures of

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290 Classical statements are given by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966), Glifford Geertz’s anthropology and Thomas Kuhn’s views on scientific knowledge as socially constructed. Among feminists, Judith Butler has argued on the same lines.


293 Peterson 2001, 54; Hekmann 1999, 85; Cuomo 1998, 114; Henriksen 2003, 67; Mellor 1997, 161, 178. Peterson refers especially to Judith Butler and Joan Scott. As a materialist ecofeminist, Mary Mellor admits that there are, however, enough commonalities between all women and all men to make these concepts practically and theoretically useful. This is worth noting, because the meaning of material qualities has been among the most debated issues in discussions between ecofeminists and other feminist philosophers.

294 This refers to any contingent world, not just the currently known one. See, e.g. Warren 1990, 143.
From the political perspective, the fact of the constructed diversity of agents implies that if there are normative notions about the way that human nature, or the nature of the morally considerable other in general, should be performed, these norms only express particular power structures. These structures maintain subordination in relationships both between humans and between humans and nature. Feminist ethics highlights emancipation of the marginalised experiences of being human as the way to improve the moral culture: everyone should take up their right to be equal expressions of humanity. As all expressions are culturally constructed, no one should be elevated over some other. And the moral relationships holding between some partners cannot be based on shared natures or identities.

Diversity remains among the moral agents in the constructivist approach. This means that authentic differences can and should be held in moral relationships, and between moral partners. Variety of (human) beings belong to the category of moral agents and claims for “similarity” seem inconsistent. The idea of fundamental diversity among moral agents, thus, challenges the idea of a moral community. A moral community as a group of beings capable of reciprocity on the ground of some shared moral identity cannot, on this view, determine the partners in a moral relationship. The modernist approach based on such an idea narrows the ethical sphere, because the idea of similarity is required as the criteria for something to count as moral. But withdrawing similarity from the conditions of moral relationship implies that moral judgements cannot be grounded on shared convictions, common idea of good life, or actually a shared idea of truth.

The threat of relativism worries especially environmentally oriented feminist ethicists. Since contextual social relations are not seen as external but as constitutive to a moral agent, personal viewpoints cannot be externalised in the construction of moral principles. From the viewpoint of environmental ethics this sounds problematic, because the material limits of the earth – especially benign conditions for human species – are not seen to be socially constructed, but rather a tragic physical reality to which our moral rationality is bound, perhaps more than we wish. Despite this dissonance, feminist environmentalists do not, with some exceptions, defend a monistic idea of human good. On the contrary, they have broadened the sphere of beings with which we shape a community of meaningful relationships: it should be seen to include also non-human members. Diversity refers not only to that among human individuals, but to various types of entities, in dialogue with which particular moral selves are constructed. The current geological age, widely

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295 “The logic of domination” is a concept used in the context of ecofeminism to point out the logic that makes oppression of women and nature parallel. The concept was launched by ecofeminist Karen Warren, but the idea has been quite widely adopted. Warren 2000, 105; Plumwood 1993, 55-9; Mellor 1997, 115, Hekman 1999, 110-13.

296 Peterson 2001, 52-3.

297 Although social constructionism is widely adopted by the writers I refer to here, constructivism is often enough to refer to the line of thought that replaces the modernist individual and impartial moral agency and objective moral reasons by constructed identities, knowledge, norms and meanings of an agent.

298 I call them all ecofeminists in this study.

299 The idea that monism as a modern essentialism provides oppression is most clear in the texts of feminist deconstructionists, such as Judith Butler and Joan Scott. See, Peterson 2001, 54.
called the Anthropocene, challenges the standard feminist constructionist approach to human agency in a way that ecofeminists have already done for some decades. Philosophers are now interested in also taking seriously the intimate relationships between material elements and the identity of the agent. The various kinds of relationships of an agent can be seen as mutually influential and even constitutive for the very idea of agency.

The second particularly interesting point of focus in the ecofeminist conception of a moral agent is the emphasis on the role of the material aspects of humanity in moral agency. Whereas environmental ethics usually locates the criticised dualism between human/cultural/social reality on the one hand, and natural/material/ecological reality on the other, ecofeminism locates the problematic dualism inside a human being, that is, within the moral agent. The problem lies in the conceptual separation between the material and free aspects in human agency in general. As Mary Mellor argues, humanity escapes its own material conditions and oppresses its own materiality if the interconnections between the biological and social are ignored. According to Mellor, in order for moral theories to be adapted for the use of environmental ethics, reformation should start from “an understanding of the material relations between humanity and nature”, together with the social relations behind unsustainable patterns. The conflicts based on dualisms can only be solved by addressing the whole question of the relationship between human agency and the material world.

Systematic analysis of ecofeminist criticism against the dominant philosophical frameworks for ethics shows that the most problematic conceptual dualism is that which concerns the inner nature of the human agent. Therefore Mellor, for instance, calls for rediscovering the fundamental immanence of humanity, and recognition of the supposed transcendence of the human agent in modern thought being just a social construction. Ecofeminists across the strategies struggle against this by valuing features that have been disvalued in the dominant masculine culture because they are supposed to represent the link between women and nature. Since characteristics connected to men have been considered both authentically human and superior to those connected to women or nature, culturally formed identities and the ideal about human agency have systematically encouraged the domination of both women and nature. From the point of view of ethics, it seems more important, therefore, to question conceptions concerning the dominant (conceptualised as “male”, “human”, “moral self”, or “the agent”) rather than the oppressed (“female”, “natural”, “moral self”).

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300 Plumwood 1994, 146-7.
301 According to Mellor, what really matters, and should be taken as the project for ecofeminism, is to make society take account of “the whole question of the materiality of human existence. That is why I have linked the concepts sex/gender to represent the interconnections of the biological and the social.” Mellor 2000, 114.
304 “Hu(man)ity is always immanent. Transcendence is socially constructed against ‘nature.’ The natural world is not dead or dumb or a product of the human mind, it is fundamentally material and subjective.” Mellor 2000, 115. Italics in the original.
305 Plumwood 1994, 144.
object”, “the other”), or even the dualism between the two. A sustainable relationship with the rest of nature requires, therefore, critical rethinking about cultural identities as human agents with the help of women’s perspective.

With regard to standard (non-environmental) types of feminist ethics, ecofeminists criticise these approaches for adopting a type of constructionist view of the human agent that commits them to world alienation. According to Mary Midgley, the problem with extreme feminist constructionist views is the supposition that what is essential for humanness is reduced to after-birth social and conceptual influence, and therefore, there is nothing conceptually important “out there”, just an empty landscape out of which human identity is constructed by conceptualisation. Features of agency are reduced to humanness excluding material determinants. Therefore, types of anti-essentialism may be seen as reductive as essentialism.

Another potentially threatening consequence of adopting extreme constructivism (from the point of view of the aspirations that ecofeminism has in environmental ethics) is included in the implied antirealism. However, according to ecofeminists, the extreme constructionist criticism against the realist views of human agency does not properly hit the target, which is the overcoming of the nature-culture dualism. A deconstructionist view of the agent describes “emancipation” through “free” constructed discourse, in contrast to the “necessity” of the conceptual determination of the real world. As the idea highlights “the subject’s destiny as a free subject”, it resembles the Kantian sublime transcendence. But while postmodern constructionism may threaten human relationships with the world as real, it can also help us to reach a new understanding of that relationship as Bonnie Mann, for instance, argues. If the concept of nature is not considered to represent just an external, fixed reality, it does not imply necessity, but refers to productivity. In the postmodern register, the agent itself is produced by the “chains of signification” in discourse. As Mann puts it, sublime transcendence can be seen in that “the discourse subjects the subject in the double sense; it both oppresses and makes. Somehow, almost magically, the productive function of discourse disappears the realm of 

306 For examples about the defence of material or earthly feminism, see especially Mary Midgley, Mary Mellor and Bonnie Mann.
307 She calls it a “blank paper” theory of human nature. The idea descends from Locke, who states: “Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas; how comes it to be furnished? ... To this I answer in one word, from EXPERIENCE; in that all our knowledge is founded.” However, according to Midgley, the founder of behaviourism John B. Watson was the first to formulate it in an extreme mode which denies all human instincts. Midgley 1978, 18.
308 Midgley 2004, 137, 141; Peterson 2001, 73. According to Peterson, by presuming that “humans possess an essential quality, the capacity to construct meaning, which all other species lack” we again give a privileged position to humans.
309 E.g. Peterson 2001, 73. The assertion that humans impose their own design on the world, and that human nature is culturally constructed, also implies asserting, contradictorily, that “culture is both a human invention and the basis from which everything else is brought into being”.
310 Mann argues that this repeats Kant’s argument concerning the “aesthetic experience that resolved the philosophical paradox of freedom and necessity. The Kantian sublime describes the quintessential moment of Euro-masculine emancipation from and domination of nature.” Deconstructionism denies, however, any subject that would precede discourse. Mann 2005, 53-4.
‘necessity’ in the old sense and sets the subject ‘free’ in the process.” This kind of thinking adopts the Kantian euro-masculine idea about what we must be free from: freedom is seen as domination over the necessities.\footnote{Mann 2005, 57.}

According to Mann, the postmodern tendency to overcome necessities simply continues the failures of the Euro-masculine conceptual tradition that justified male supremacy (freedom connected to human culture) by attaching women to the realm of necessity (connected to nature). The problem lies in understanding emancipation as freedom from material relationships, which are seen as “necessities”.\footnote{Now, a “deconstructive affirmative action makes this transcendent freedom available to all subjects, but the Euro-masculinist structure of freedom as emancipation from the realm of necessity (now as determinacy) remains intact”. In postmodernism feminism, discursive contingency is seen to entail freedom. Mann 2005, 52-3.}

This is a fantasy like the pre-modern and modern attempts to overcome the limits of human agency. Instead, Mann suggests a kind of disobedient feminist epistemology that does not “capitulate to a fantasy of emancipation from the natural world”. Feminism should continue to protest against the association of women with the realm of necessity – claimed either for biological or social reasons – but it should also protest against the “dissociation of human beings in general from this realm”.\footnote{Mann 2005, 58. ‘Freedom’ from the earth [...] is suicidal,” Mann 2005, 60.}

I agree here with Mann. Perhaps the most interesting feminist idea from the point of view of environmental ethics is the attempt to depict human dependencies as the place from which moral knowledge is possible. This knowledge can thus guide our relationships with other people and the earth towards the best in the sense of moral realism. On a somewhat similar line, Eva Kittay argues that the universality of dependence as the human condition can be seen as a basis for the ethics of care. The experience of dependence is the place from which we can know what is essential for justice and good social policy.\footnote{Kittay 1999, 49-50, 75, 79-82.}

Our relationships with nature, too, are something we can know and articulate only from the “place” of our dependence on the earth. Kittay’s way of thinking represents a new relational account of the moral subject.\footnote{The kind of materialised feminism, “a new feminist understanding of our relationship to the physical realm of necessity”, makes use of “the postmodern effort to understand the freedom of the agent in the chain of signification”. If the realm of necessity is understood to be like the chain of signification in postmodern feminism, such as Judith Butler’s view, as not just something that bounds or limits the subject, but also as something that produces the subject, then “the paradox of freedom and necessity can be reworked on a material level”. Mann 2005, 59. Butler’s account of productive discourse turns back to necessities. See Butler 2005.}

Mann broadens the view to material dependencies. Earthly dependencies should be considered a productive place that enables and empowers moral deliberation and action: “The earth is not our prison, but a productive place we inhabit, that constitutes and enlivens us moment by moment.”\footnote{Mann 2005, 60.}

This does not, however, imply any essentialism. On the contrary, the material partners and non-human others are, in a way, included in the discourse, prior to the social one.\footnote{Just as postmodern theory has claimed that discourse constructs the subject, we see that outside of and prior to discourse the earth itself ‘constructs’ and sustains the subject, moment by moment.” Mann 2005, 59. I argue that here is a link between the purposes of ecofeminist constructivism and non-reductive evolutionary naturalism. Although Mann does not make the link, this and some other notions refer to the evolutionary realm. Although constructionism widely holds that conceptualisation always...} Mary Mellor also places...
interrelationships and discourse into the historical processes that tie us to nature.\textsuperscript{318} Human activity is neither natural nor unnatural in the sense that we could claim that nature would be better or worse off without humanity. The relationship between human agents and their nonhuman partners is essentially a moral question about the quality of the continuous mutual interaction.\textsuperscript{319}

To sum up, the second special focus of ecological feminism is to argue that conceptual rethinking should bring about a repositioning and revaluing of the excluded and despised features of human existence. Dependencies and features that represent the conquered or oppressed (dependency, contextuality or emotionality) should be appreciated as authentic and ideal features of humanity and definitive features of a moral agent, instead of or at least besides features appreciated as decisive for the agent in modernism (rationality, individuality and self-constitution). When the features of the conquered, devalued and strange are recognised as constitutive elements of the moral agent, they form a bridge between moral agents and the others we continue to conquer. Such a bridge restores the continuity between humans, animals and the material world without assimilation or losing the value of “difference”.\textsuperscript{320} According to my interpretation, the ecofeminist project aspires to reconceptualise the idea of moral agency rather than the self. Ecofeminists seem quite convinced that considering the ecological conditions of human life to be quintessential moral rationality, rather than external to rationality represents a remarkable difference in the ability of moral theories to face environmental questions.

The third interesting point of focus worth acknowledging concerning the ecofeminist conception of moral agency is that being human as a moral self is fundamentally considered to be a self-in-relationship. Both embodiment and embeddedness are central for the ecofeminist conception of the human agent. While embodiment refers to materiality, embeddedness refers widely to the relationships in which this embodiment takes place. Ecological embeddedness includes an idea of relative activity among different things in the world: ecological and social structures are essential for what it is to practise human capacities.

Ecofeminists thus reject the idea that the features of agency are isolated or unique in the sense that differs from the dependencies common for animals. The tendency of modern ethics to devalue features of dependency and relationality in moral deliberation and action overemphasises the importance of impartiality. This may be harmful for the moral culture. Most ecofeminists agree with care ethicists that relational features, which are usually described as bodily, emotional, biological or socio-ecologically bound (in contrast with those that can be described as mental, takes place in discourse, it does not necessarily presume that discourse is just a linguistic question in the sense of actual spoken human languages.

\textsuperscript{318} “While humanity is embedded in the natural world, its interrelationship with its environment is an historical process. As conscious and socially constructive beings, humanity dialectically interrelates with nonhuman nature in different ways over time and across cultures. Neither humanity nor ‘nature’ are determinant; what is inescapable are the consequences of the dynamics between them.” Mellor 1997, 13.

\textsuperscript{319} According to Mellor, “humanity cannot exist without ‘nature’ and as there is no ‘natural’ way for humanity to relate to it, human existence in nature becomes a material, political and moral question”. Mellor 1997, 188.

\textsuperscript{320} Plumwood 1994, 154.
rational, intentional or free), should not be detached from moral deliberation.\footnote{For examples of classical arguments defending relational features as part of moral activity, see Mary Midgley, \textit{Heart and Mind} (New York: St Martin's, 1981), 4, 12; Sarah Ruddick, “Maternal Thinking,” Feminist Studies 6 (1980): 348; Carol McMillan, \textit{Women, Reason and Nature} (Princeton N.J: Princeton University Press, 1982): 28; Kaarina Kailo, “Sustainable Cultures of Life and Gift Circulation: A New Model for the Green/Postcolonial Restructuring of Europe? (Sustainable cultures—Cultures of Sustainability, 2008. http://www.gift-economy.com/backgroundpapers9.pdf, accessed 11.1.2020). For an analysis of these arguments and a couple of other similar ones, see Kheel 2007, 48-50.} “Human” attention to “nature” cannot be impartial in the modern sense. Instead, Val Plumwood and Lori Gruen, for instance, use the term “engaged empathy” when they refer to the meaning of a commitment to those we are related to as important for motivation and wisdom.\footnote{Gruen 2009; Plumwood 1999. See also Little 2007b and Noddings 2013.} The feminist conception of human nature implies that a human also retains a self-in-relationship as a moral agent. Relational features, such as gender, place, race, religion, social class, friends and opportunities are features that shape our way of being a self and our modes of knowing. Material and social conditions are not only contingent for us being human or representing moral agency.\footnote{Warren 2000, 90.}

Consequently, ideal humanity should not be defined as isolated from biological or ecological realities. As Karen Warren states it, “relationships are not something extrinsic to who we are, not an ‘add on’ feature of human nature; they play an essential role in shaping what it is to be human.”\footnote{Warren 1990, 143.} Relationships, through which a human life comes into its particular existence, and through which the concepts are constructed, are constitutive rather than external by nature. Therefore, moral relationships are always relationships between materially and socially contextual and mutually interdependent parties. Being human “essentially” is being and acting in relation to different others, and thus, there is no “being human” in isolation – it is always being human in the world.\footnote{Warren 1990, 143.} Construction of one’s moral identity is heavily embedded in the context and the dialogues in which it takes place. As an agent, a human being both constructs her very nature through conceptual, cultural and social structures, and is constructed by the relationships influential in her identity, knowledge, norms and meanings. A person becomes an agent through constructive interaction. Therefore, his agency cannot be isolated from the contingent epithets of humanity, or from the historical, cultural, social and material settings, or his own narrative. It is impossible for an agent to rise above his own particular perspective or personal relationships; his agency takes place in dialogues to which he is committed and in relationships to which she or he is attached.\footnote{Features that shape the way that an agent is a self and his or her modes of knowing are mainly relational features (e.g. gender, place, race, religion, social class, friends, and opportunities). Also, value concepts used in moral arguments, such as interests and well-being, usually consist of inter-relative, social elements. They cannot be defined without reference to others and their interests or well-being.} The dialogical nature of the moral self is not restricted to descriptions of the conditions of human agency. As a moral self is constantly constructed in relationship with various things, either internal or external to one’s own skin, these relationships are constitutive rather than conditional by nature. They
cannot be excluded from the very idea of moral deliberation, the validity of which cannot, thus, be described as impartial, neutral or objective.

Ecofeminists reject the modernist claim for the idea of shared freedom as the core of moral agency, which both marks the similarity between partners in a moral community and is isolated from the contextual features. Relationships should be seen as constitutive rather than external for the moral self, too. The idea of impartiality represents a view that is both narrow and implausible, and as an ideal it externalises the important partial relationships of an agent – by which his identity is constructed – from the idea of his genuine moral agency. According to ecofeminist and often also feminist ethics in general, this kind of externalisation works for the logic of domination. The core of a human, human “uniqueness”, which is connected to the noble feature of being an agent, cannot be isolated from being a “human in the world” without the serious likelihood of maintaining oppression. According to many feminist ethicists, the idea of stable and untouched agency is both mistaken and needless. The unique feature that makes us represent moral agency, does not have to be individualist. On the contrary, according to ecofeminists, moral agency can be seen as elementally connected with the relational features of the agent. In addition to the difference this makes compared to the individualist, stable idea of the agency, it also brings animals and humans closer to each other as agents.

If this is the case, moral theories that do not take the relational nature of the agent into account, cannot succeed. According to Val Plumwood, denial of the importance of emotions and particularity for moral life exemplify an attempt to control these human properties by glorifying superior, “interest-free” and “masculine” reason. Environmental ethics seeking to guide us to live in harmony with the environment within this kind of framework that alienates us from ecological structures would be incoherent. Instead of that, ecofeminists like Jim Cheney and Donna Haraway, together with Plumwood, defend an interactive argument about the role of the agent’s relationships in the construction of knowledge and moral meanings. According to them, epistemic as well as moral knowledge is constructed, in Plumwood’s words, “in conversation with nature”. The idea is common in discussions on environmentalist epistemology. The role the agent’s relationships and partiality play in ecofeminist ethics somewhat parallels the role they play in feminist epistemology, especially in feminist standpoint theory: interactivity in particular relationships is essential for knowledge construction, as well as for the construction of moral norms. Epistemology as a constructivist notion requires valid activity from the part of the epistemic agent: the criteria of knowledge are derived from the criteria given to valid constructive activity. Therefore, epistemic virtues rely on certain moral virtues. If knowledge construction is considered a dialogical process, it requires offering space
and respectful listening to the partner who is the object of knowledge. Valuing and disvaluing are central methods for offering and denying space.331

2.4.3 CARE FOR OTHERS AS CARE FOR ONE’S MORAL ABILITY

The three aspects highlighted by ecofeminists as conditions of moral agency – diversity, inner non-dualism, and relationality – pose challenges to the dominant understanding of the moral agent as an autonomous and rational agent. Hence, implications for the structure of moral theory are also to be expected. Constructionist anthropology implies that social particularities are constitutive for one’s moral deliberation and acting. Both the identities of agents and the knowledge agents can achieve are bound to the relationships by which they are constructed. A feminist account of moral agency that can be called *ecologically relational* argues that relational features shape human ways of reasoning and being autonomous. Practical deliberation and all modes of knowing possible for human agents are relational.332

This calls for reconceptualisation of the dominant concept of autonomy. But if so, it has implications even at the level of metaethical discussion. A claim for conceptual revision is not an easy one, as it brings with it questions about the limits of responsibility and moral truth. The concept of autonomy is important for feminist ethics, especially for discussions about giving voice to the subordinated. Therefore, contextual and relational notions of autonomy have been carefully developed, especially in feminist bioethics.333 Feminist ethicists disagree with regard to the traditional way of conceiving autonomy. According to one line of thought, famously defended by Simone de Beauvoir, autonomy is important for the full realisation of one’s agency.334 Autonomy is also possible but requires releasing people from oppressive relationships and empowering them by supportive relationships to use their own freedom.335 So, relationships, solidarity, love and care are necessary conditions for a person’s ability to use her own voice and perform autonomy: the use of noble agency requires liberation by relationality.336 This kind of autonomy is defined in terms of freedom and its claim for giving full moral agency to the oppressed arises from the assumption that moral agency is compromised by oppression.337

331 Cheney and Weston, for example, talk about *ethics-based epistemology*. See Cheney and Weston 1999.

332 The concept of ecology refers here, thus, not to the facts about ecosystems in which human actions take place, but rather, ecology refers to the structure of being human, too. This is the sense of ecology to which also the key concept of this study, *ecological relationality* refers in the following chapters.

333 For interpretations of autonomy in feminist ethics, see Mackenzie & Stoljar (eds.), *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self* (New York: Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000). The conceptual research worked out concerning relational autonomy in these fields should be profoundly scrutinised in environmental ethics, too.


335 See e.g. Friedman 2000 and Meyers 2000.

336 Beauvoir’s type of feminism, for example, struggles to recognise women’s selfhood and agency, and to free women to use their full autonomy. Some ecofeminists criticise this for devaluing the agency of the “Other”, which may be different from that of the “One”. According to Bonnie Mann, for example, making transcendent freedom available to all implies the adoption of freedom as emancipation from determinacy. It highlights “the subject’s destiny as a free subject”. Mann 2005, 52-4.

337 As Sarah Hoagland states, this suggestion can be seen to imply that oppression diminishes moral agency, and thus, those who are oppressed are not so much moral agents as those who are not oppressed.
However, since the notion of “noble agency” represents the idea charged with the imbalance of nature, many ecofeminists are critical of this interpretation and call for a conceptual revision.

Another line of thought thus reconceptualises autonomy in a way that admits the causal and cultural limitations of freedom as not compromising moral autonomy. Instead, they can be seen as positive forces on which each and every human needs to build his or her autonomy. The types of autonomy may be diverse: the autonomy of oppressed partners also represents the idea of noble agency.338 Non-constrained or isolated autonomy is an illusion. Admitting relationality does not mean subjection to the powerful. According to this view, relationalities may play a positive role in moral deliberation without a transcendent target of liberation.339 Unwillingness to admit that humans are fundamentally embedded in the social and natural environments only reflects the modernist supposition that relationality would devalue human worth. This is why ecofeminists tend to defend the contextual and relational view of autonomy rather than the liberational view. Ecofeminists usually argue that the only autonomy one can achieve is relative to the environments one is embedded in: autonomy is only possible with the help of the contextual and relational nature of human agency.340 Value concepts, such as interests and well-being, also refer to interrelative, social elements. Put briefly, the idea of a moral agent as a self-in-relationship entails that an agent’s moral capability is constructed in relationships with various others.341 Ecological feminists also emphasise that individual, isolated autonomy is an environmentally harmful concept.342

Therefore, relational autonomy is, in a way, an ethically grounded conception, which always leaves us in uncertainty with regard to both free action and objective truths. Assuming that some act or standpoint is non-relational would only authorise its domination. Given that historical, cultural, social and ecological structures are constitutive for the agent, it seems impossible to purify one’s “noble agency” from their influence. If this is not accepted, some standpoints are just claimed – for some reasons – to be more neutral or autonomous than some others, though such claims amount to moral structures that are oppressive. According to feminist ethics, perspectives privileged by particular power structures cannot express moral truth in the best possible way. This does not, however, at least not necessarily, entail a relativism of any kind. Neither does it imply denial of the struggle for the better, nor does it admit oppression. But what does it mean is that the target of the struggle is


338 We might even talk about a “women type” of autonomy when focusing on some special features of particular women’s ways of practising autonomy. This should not be confused with a fatalist view that defeats the struggle for something “better” on the grounds that each being is bound to his/her position. Feminist approaches deny fatalism and essentialism. The line of feminist thought should thus be seen as a criticism against the value laden conception of agency, one that calls us to dismiss our earthly human conditions.

339 For a more detailed analysis of this view, see the anthology Mackenzie & Stoljar 2000.

340 This has to do with the dismissed role of material aspects in human life and action. See, e.g. Plumwood 1993, 22-4; Plumwood 1994.


342 See, e.g. Plumwood 1993, 36-40.
located differently. If the moral capability of an agent relies on the quality of his or her various relationships, the struggle for the best possible relationships is well justified. Relationally assisted autonomy requires the kind of attitude towards others that constructs the best possible ability to make decisions. But the result does not just benefit the individual, rather it benefits the wider collective around him, too. Hence, the relational interpretation of autonomy does not take agency merely as a description, but also as a prescriptive notion.343

The idea of a relationally functioning autonomy emphasises the quality of relationships, which is among the reasons that forms of care ethics are favoured among ecofeminists.344 Relational autonomy seems capable of clearly preventing a dualism between reason and emotion and is applicable to various types of relationships that hold between a diversity of entities. Karen Warren argues against non-ecological feminist ethics that it may use “in certain contexts and for certain purposes” some modernist means, for example rights language. According to Warren, a coherent ecofeminist ethics cannot use such language. Instead, ecofeminist ethics “involves a shift from a conception of ethics as primarily a matter of rights, rules, or principles”, and instead, turns towards ethics that emphasises the role of “values of care, love, friendship, trust, and appropriate reciprocity – values that presuppose that our relationships to others are central to our understanding of who we are”.345 Warren argues that non-feminist environmental ethics that cannot offer an alternative to the notion of human supremacy over nature, since it approves assumptions that promote and maintain such notion, namely ethical absolutism, ethical monism, objective moral standpoint,346 and conceptual essentialism.347 Care-sensitive ethics denies these assumptions and, therefore, it can adopt the relational view about moral decision making. Situated principles can more fruitfully be used in the kind of agency taking place in the dialogical type of reasoning.

The care approach is compatible with an appreciation of diversity inside the moral community. According to Warren and Val Plumwood, for instance, morality in a relationship refers to the agent’s ability to care and love, not to equal treatment offered for beings that are similar to oneself. Warren defends a modification of care ethics, which she calls care-sensitive ethics, as an appropriate way to formulate the morally justified relationships between humans and non-human nature.348 The three conditions for a care-sensitive ethics are the ability to care, situated universalism, and

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343 I shall return to the relational conception of autonomy in chapter 3, section 3.4.3.
344 Care ethics largely originates from Carol Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice* (1982), in which she describes “the activity of care”, “responsibility” and “relationships” as central for women’s conception of morality. Gilligan 1982, 19. Care ethics has been developed in a way that has influenced ecofeminist ethics especially via Nel Noddings’ works and writings, such as *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984, and later editions). See also Sarah Ruddick’s *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).
345 Warren 1990, 138, 141, 144.
346 This, she thinks is claimed, for example, by Peter Singer and Tom Reagan in their theories. Warren 2000, 106-9.
347 Instead, Warren offers the idea of *strategic essentialism*. It means that for practical reasons and efficiency, it may be worth talking about essentialist concepts, such as the moral person, moral theory, the self, even woman and nature. But contrary to conceptual essentialism, they do not refer to any particular biologically determined or socially unorganised concepts. Warren 2000, 90-1.
348 Warren 2000, 106-9. In contrast to some other forms of care ethics, it does not rely on essentialist notions.
care practices. Warren argues for the relevance of the care tradition for environmentalism because of its emphasis on the relational nature of the moral community: “[a] loving (or caring) perception presupposes and maintains difference – a distinction between the self and other […] A moral community based on loving perception of oneself in relationship with a rock is one that acknowledges and respects difference, in addition to whatever sameness or commonality also exists.” Since the partiality of the relational agent is inescapable, moral principles or rules cannot be seen as absolute or universal, but as situated, although they can carry on comparable elements. Care practices can, however, be followed by an agent capable of caring as the criteria for discerning which principles are relevant to the situation.

Understanding the agent as a self-in-relation involves not just a revised understanding of autonomy, but also a revised understanding of rationality. Val Plumwood in particular argues that “[r]ationalistic culture has distorted many spheres of human life” and states that the biophysical limits of the planet we must face due to human “rational” activity show that the old previous understanding of a reason-centred culture “has become a liability to survival”. Rationalism fails to give the whole picture of rationality in its full complexity. According to Plumwood, rationalism lacks an awareness of “ecological embeddedness, nature’s agency and limits, and human dependency on the non-human sphere”. Knowledge is, according to rationalism, “the product of reason, not of the senses or the body”. An alternative, ecologically sound rationality, which she calls “the rationality of care”, should be essentially dialogical. The core failure in the dominant conception of rationality is, according to Plumwood, the separated narratives of the knowing subject and the known natural object. The transformation needed in science is not just political, but also epistemic. Plumwood aspires to articulate the “care models of knowledge” that breaks down the radical subject/object division and allows agency to the known in the dialogical relationship that ends up in something we call knowledge. This kind of knowledge is also the ground for an ethically integrated

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349 “I locate the moral significance of care in three features of what I call ‘care-sensitive ethics.’ First, an essential aspect of moral reasoning and moral motivation is the ability-to-care about oneself and others. I call this the ‘ability-to-care’ condition. Second, the universality of ethical principles is as ‘situated universals’, in contrast to the traditional notion of ‘universals’ as ahistorical, transcendent, absolute universals. I call this the condition of ‘situated universalism.’ Third, the appropriateness or suitability of any ethical principle or practice in a given context is determined, at least in part, by considerations of care. I call this the ‘care practices condition.’” Warren 2000, 108, Plumwood 1994, 145-6.


352 Plumwood 2002, 46. Although the transition towards empiricism turned some basic suppositions of knowledge, it retained, at least according to Plumwood, the notion of the alienation from and devaluation of nature as an object of knowledge. See Plumwood 2002, 47.

353 Plumwood 2002, 44-5, 53. “A more dialogical and less hyper-separated interpretation of the subject/object relationship together with a dialogical interpretation of objectivity would give us a better, more democratic and communicative form of scientific rationality, and one less open to capture by those economic forces that increasingly rule our world.” (pp. 44-45). The dialogical approach to care practices has also been strengthened through the development of care ethics. Josephine Donovan, for example, argues that at the core of the theory there is “a dialogical ethic of care”. Donovan 2007, 362.
science of care:355 “Caring rationality sees ethics and social responsibility as a crucial part of science and of the scientist’s task.”356

The search for a moral rationality that would be appropriate for relational agents seems to bring the discussion on moral reasoning closer to epistemology.357 One of the ways that the conception of the agent may influence the concept of moral rationality has to do, I think, with the role of knowledge in moral deliberation. Most usually it is thought that the relationship between epistemology and ethics is a one-way influence, though recently this view has been vigorously impugned. Jim Cheney and Anthony Weston argue that environmental philosophy in particular calls into question this mono-directed influence. A more plausible way would be to think that “the world we inhabit arises most fundamentally out of our ethical practice”.358 An ethical action should not be seen as a response to the knowledge about the fixed world. In order to know, we need to offer “space” and “invite” the hidden possibilities of the world to meet with our awareness. Ethical action is thus a requirement as well as a response.359 Karen Warren also stresses that moral reasons are the first reasons, not just in ethics but also in epistemic activity through the need to choose a “loving perception” towards the known.360 The required moral condition, “the ability to care”, is not, however, just the basis for choosing right for the correct reason; it is itself a crucial aspect of moral motivation, moral reasoning, and moral practices, which means that there is, according to Warren, no external reason to “be moral” besides the essential relationality of the moral agent bound to care for those with whom he shares his world.361

I argue that the ecofeminist aspiration to relationally reconsider epistemic and moral rationality offers a valuable insight for all environmental ethicists struggling with the question of how to combine the factual contingences of the moral agent with a universally binding respect for ecological sustainability.362 I shall return to the relational approach to knowledge, rationality and autonomy in chapter 3.

356 Plumwood 2002, 55.
357 Besides the example given here, especially feminist discussions on epistemic rationality, such as the feminist standpoint theory, are relevant here.
358 Cheney & Weston 1999, 115-6.
359 “It [love] thus stands at the beginning, at the core, of ethics itself: a venture as well as an adventure – a risk, an attitude that may (may, for we cannot say for sure at the beginning) lead in time to more knowledge of someone or something, wholly wild possibilities.” Cheney & Weston 1999, 116-8. See also Weston 2004, 32.
360 Warren 2000, 104-5. Preconditions of knowledge and value judgements are bound to place and time, but this does not mean that all knowledge or value judgements are equally good. Warren 2000, 156.
361 Warren 2000, 108-112. “So, if the question Why care? is understood as like the question Why be moral? – that is, as seeking some foundational principle in the traditional philosophical sense – there is no answer that will satisfy one who does not accept moral reasons as bona fide reasons.” Warren 2000, 112.
362 In sketching her view of an ethically sustainable rationality Plumwood finds support from Sandra Harding. “As Harding argues, there are much more effective dialogical ways to counter partial and distorted beliefs that do not demand a generalised emotional detachment – for example in the form of dialogical contexts in which those most likely to be affected by and able to detect forms of bias (for example, women and other Others) are able to contest centric and undemocratic constructions of science.” Plumwood 2002, 44.
2.4.4 A CONSTRAINED CONSTRUCTIONIST VIEW OF MORAL AGENCY

The idea of agency seems to form a dilemma for ecological feminists.\(^{363}\) The problem lies in the tension between the feminist aspiration for emancipation and the environmentalist aspiration for recognition of the genuine agency of ecologically determined beings.\(^{364}\) What has been said here about the conception of the moral agent in ecofeminism shows that the adoption of an ecofeminist approach to environmental ethics calls for conceptual rethinking that also plays a role in the formulation of ethical theories. Compared to mainstream feminist constructionism, which is said to celebrate the linguistic turn in ethics, it is justified to call ecofeminism a constrained type of constructionism as, for instance, Karen Warren articulates. The material perspective of the agency, especially, makes the ecofeminist conception of agency interesting also from the viewpoint of constructivism as an ethical theory.\(^{365}\)

This is, I think, an important point to keep in mind: the conceptual shift about ecological relationality concerns the concept of agency, and this has a restraining effect on constructivism in ethics. Therefore, relationality turns the focus to the method rather than the contents of ethics. Like most ecofeminists, Warren defends realism, although she shifts the focus to the method. Understanding human lives in a relational narrative implies that living one’s story and shaping one’s agency require a constant effort to see one’s own world from the perspectives of others in order to approach what is good.\(^{366}\) There are moral reasons that should be seen practically as the first reasons for both ethics and epistemology. An appropriate act must be to choose a “loving perception” of others in order to know or understand, not just for moral reasons.\(^{367}\) Care is an appropriate method to evaluate reliable from unreliable knowledge, as well as to evaluate moral principles. Anna Peterson argues, for her part, that we are responsible for mediating moral truths by acting according to this method in relationships with earthly others – both dialogically and by recognising the reality with which we construct our moral agency.\(^{368}\) In contrast to the epic of evolution, which is causal by nature, the narrative structure of the relational agent involves complex two-way influences. Imagining the future and beliefs concerning it are present in the current process of identity formation, and hence of agency construction.\(^{369}\) I argue that ecofeminist notions about the moral agent have implications for some central elements of theories about moral action.

To conclude my remarks about ecofeminist discussions at this stage, I would like to emphasise three features of ecofeminism that are especially interesting from the point of view of this study. They concern (1) the plurality of perspectives and the reasons for action due to the fundamental diversity of moral agents, (2) the role of the

\(^{363}\) Sarah Hoagland and María Lugones, for instance, criticise Chris Cuomo about defending two conflicting views of moral agency in her definition of ecological feminist ethics. Cuomo 1998, 104; Hoagland 1999, 92.

\(^{364}\) Cuomo 1998, 63.

\(^{365}\) E.g. Warren 1990, 143; Warren 2000, 90. For more, see section 4.3.

\(^{366}\) Peterson 2001, 237.

\(^{367}\) Warren 2000, 104-5.

\(^{368}\) Peterson 2001, 211-2.

\(^{369}\) In this sense, relationally oriented feminist environmental ethics also involves a teleological aspect. See e.g. Peterson 2001, 226-7.
material elements and relationships of the moral agent in moral reasoning derived from the inner non-dualism of human agents, and (3) a modest understanding of autonomy as relational autonomy, derived from the fundamental conception of a moral self as self-in-relationships.

These features are of interest for the following reasons: (1) The plurality of perspectives resulting from the diversity of genuine agents and their modes of knowing implies that the reasons for actions are also plural. In order to seek for universal commitments to, say, environmental conducts, the formulation of such ethical conducts cannot be separated from the ways in which different perspectives and viewpoints are taken into account, or the ways different agents are interconnected with each other. No one can alone achieve a justified moral reason for action. But justified moral reasons cannot, according to an ecofeminist perspective, be achieved inside a human community alone, either. Therefore, ecofeminist approaches seem to claim that help from and cooperation with the non-human partners and “informants” that share the ecological community with us is highly needed in the construction of moral principles and conducts. (2) Ecofeminist wavering between constructionist and realist views about the nature of things expresses an aspiration to combine two approaches that represent metaphysically contradictory positions about human nature into a coherent view about human agency when it is observed from a temporally wider perspective. Social construction does not only concern concepts (about nature or the direction of emancipation), but in some sense, also the “real world”. This is because the constructed concepts adopted by a particular agent are considered to influence the interventions he or she makes in the material world, and these interventions are seen to cause such environmental changes that, again, have an impact on the abilities of agents and societies to make further constructions about concepts. (3) Moral agency as committed to partiality and fundamental relationality implies reconceptualising autonomy as relational, both in the social and the material ecological sense. One possible interpretation about the specific ecofeminist way of understanding relational autonomy highlights the “loving perception” as a condition of autonomy. The agent’s particular way of being related to the issue she is describing influences her ability to make moral deliberations concerning that issue. Her autonomy depends on the quality of her relationships with the partner being the object of her act or deliberation.

The supposition in ecofeminism seems to be that conceptual rethinking concerning these issues can also make moral theories more capable of efficiently dealing with environmental issues. However, insisting on change in the way that human or non-human nature is conceptualised does not necessarily seem to refer, in ecofeminism, to changes in an understanding of how things are, but rather to one’s moral attitude and practical relationships towards epistemic objects. Choosing one’s descriptive notions (that is, constructing the world) is an ethical task with real effects (on the world and on the agent). The next questions thus would be, what are the moral reasons for making these choices, what makes some relationships better than some others, and how can we know what they are? I shall return to these questions in

370 The term here includes also relationships with non-human living organisms.
chapters 4 and 5. From the ecofeminist perspective, however, answers to the metaethical question of justification seem to be closely connected with answers to the questions: Who are we going to be? Or, who do we want to be? But these are not in any sense private questions. Our wishes and beliefs are dialogically bound to those of other people and to our material and living surroundings. Wishes and beliefs concerning the future of humanity also direct our actions. By describing the world, we transform humanity; and by interventions in the material processes we construct our own nature and that of various others.

At first sight, constructivism seems to be a convenient ethical theory to choose: it grounds moral principles and standards on the decisions gained in some optimal political deliberation (e.g. John Rawls) or moral discourse (e.g. Jürgen Habermas). However, ecofeminists worry about the possibility of traditional modes of constructivism to offer ethical frameworks for dealing with good relationships that are wider than those inside the traditional moral community. The community of mutual interactions significant for moral theory formulation could be better described in terms of ecological community and evaluated from the perspective of evolutionary time. A claim to take seriously the mutual construction of the agent and her various “partners” also seems to have remarkable implications in moral philosophy. The idea that moral agents are products resulting from ecologically structured processes of interactive construction, in which material, biological, social and mental factors take part, means that in relation to (even external material) nature a human being is in relation to the constitutive elements of her own being. Such a relationship cannot be compared to any other relationship – although the relation between a foetus and her mother, or a new-born child and those who care for her may form an exception. Therefore, for these reasons, environmental issues have actualised a wider discussion about the roles of contextual conditions in ethics.

2.5 SOME NOTES ABOUT ONTOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE RELATIONAL SELF

The quest for a third way beyond essentialism and constructivism about the human subject – one that does not slide a theory into reductive naturalism, postmodern relativism or metaphysical essentialism – is often interpreted to presume ontological modifications. I argue that the metaphysical approach is unnecessary. However, because the relational moral subject is a concept much used in environmental philosophy, for instance by those drawing from process philosophy or Asian philosophy, it is worth briefly discussing their approaches. These philosophies offer illuminative insights about a relational definition of moral agency, but basically their definitions are grounded on some particular speculative metaphysical system that limits the sphere of discussion and their political influence.

As an ontological issue, relationality exemplifies itself in positions that break down the boundary between the static world and the active subject. Positions that focus on relationships as ontologically primary aim to overcome the bifurcation
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between (material) objects and (mental) subjects in the world, and between body, mind as well as internal and external operations in human agency. Not surprisingly, environmental philosophers are keen on these trains of thought, although they have been philosophically quite marginal. Since environmental philosophers are sometimes also personally deeply committed to environmentalism, one difficulty for a researcher is to make a distinction between tendentious arguments, vague metaphysical views, ideologies, and clear philosophical argumentation.

Despite the possible implications for ontological discussion, the relational concept of moral agency is not bound to any metaphysical view. This concept is familiar in many marginal Western philosophies, such as process thought, Asian philosophy, several indigenous spiritual traditions, and even in some Western modes of theological philosophy. These worldviews fascinate environmental philosophers precisely on account of their included potentiality to talk about environmental ethics from a wider perspective than traditional Western modern ethics. Some environmentalists find valuable indigenous visions that indicate that the very nature and operations of the self are tied to the relationships with particular places, and with material as well as living partners. Some others prefer the Buddhist view of relational identity formation, while again others argue for the environmental benefits of Confucian insights. Most of these conceptions share an emphasis on the

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371 Among environmental philosophers there are notable philosophers, mathematicians and logicians who have renounced their credibility as “proper philosophers” in order to find philosophical alternatives to the common way of thought. For example, Richard Routley (who for example developed alternative logics), Fritjof Capra (physicist and system theorist; see e.g. The Tao of Physics. London: Wildwood House 1975), Arne Naess (philosopher and logician), and even Alfred North Whitehead (mathematician and philosopher) have been at least partly motivated by their awareness of the destructive character of predominant dualisms, static worldviews and the isolation of morality and moral agency from the physical world.

372 For example, Martin Buber’s theology. The focus, in the Western relational thinking is often on the social relationships and dialogical construction of identity, rather than on ecological relations.


374 The Buddhist teaching of emptiness has been seen to coincide with holistic environmentalism, and therefore, Buddhist ideas are referred to as ecologically exemplary by, for instance, Arne Naess, J. Baird Callicott, Bill Devall, Warwick Fox, and Frederick Ferré. See Naess 1998, 207-8, Callicott 2008, Fox 2003, 252, Devall 1990, and Ferré 2001, 209-10. However, according to many recent studies, Buddhist philosophy does not support ecological holism: humans are not one with the world in the sense that they share ecological laws with everything else. See Shani 2009; James 2007, 452-6; See also Christopher Chapple, “Jainism and Buddhism” in A Companion to Environmental Philosophy (ed. D. Jamieson, Malden, Oxford, Melbourne: Blackwell Publishing 2005): 52-66. Given that metaphysical holism implies problems for a theory of ethics, further investigation of whether this is the case is unnecessary. Instead, the feature that may make Buddhist teaching environmentally friendly is teaching about the aims of human life, well-being and character by virtue of which the development towards these goals can be realised. James 2007, 456. As such, Buddhism engenders and enforces a kind of environmental virtue ethics rather than holism. Shani 2009; James 2007, 456-8; Hourdequin and Wong 2005.

complexity and meaning of the physical, mental and semantic relations to the very being of the self, or the agent.

However helpful shifts in the metaphysical level are, they are not necessarily the best way to capture all the aspects of relational agency. I do not argue that relational ontology cannot form a valid foundation for a relational approach to ethics. But the reason for not concentrating on them is that as speculative approaches they do not efficiently answer the sustainability crisis of ethics, in which politically adoptable approaches are needed. One of the weaknesses of both speculative metaphysics and religious worldviews is that formulating a globally efficient ethical view on them would imply that the new worldview should be first widely adopted. Their ability to reasonably discuss with the representatives of other worldviews and convince them about conducts is intimately based on the particular ontological perspective. My choice here is to focus on the mechanisms of agency rather than on their ontological explanations. For instance, the empirical fact that material surroundings modify and shape the ways we think, feel, believe, reason and act involves ethically deep challenges that are not bound to ontological views. The border between metaphysics and other fields of philosophy is, of course, vague. Therefore, it is worth briefly introducing two popular ontological approaches to the relational self and agency in environmental philosophy, process philosophy and Asian philosophies, which will be exemplified by referring to a form of Confucian virtue ethics.

Process philosophy, originating mainly in Alfred North Whitehead’s writings, has been of great interest among environmental philosophers and theologians because of its thoroughly relational understanding of human and natural activity.\textsuperscript{376} It offers an alternative to the dominant dualisms without sliding either into a vague holism or into haphazard pluralism and it exemplifies a genuine pluralism of interconnected parties and activities. Since process philosophy combines mental and material relationships into a fundamentally relational and process-based ontology, it can also offer a valid foundation for rejecting the juxtaposition between naturalism and constructivism.\textsuperscript{377} Whitehead constructs a profoundly articulated speculative system in which the aspects of active, responsible agency and the physical world are not divided. Being is fundamentally connected with acting: becoming constitutes being, and creativity, as a relational term, is used about the ultimate power and authoritative principle. Instead of talking about substances, process philosophy lifts up events to

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\textsuperscript{376} Especially deep ecologists, ecotheologians and ecofeminists often find this dynamistic ontology a promising tool to overcome destructive binaries. Interest in process thought was high especially during the 1980s and 1990s but has declined since then. However, the basic insight and the relational vocabulary have remained vital for many. For more about Whitehead’s philosophy as a framework for environmental ethics, see my previous work, on which the arguments here are based. Suvielise Nurmi, \textit{Ekologisen etiikan perusta Alfred North Whiteheadin filosofisessa}. Master’s thesis (Faculty of Theology, University of Helsinki, 1995).

\textsuperscript{377} Therefore, it has both constructivist advocates, such as ecofeminists Sally McFague (see e.g. \textit{Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature}. London: SCM Press Ltd. 1997), Catherine Keller and Bryan Bannon (see e.g. “Developing Val Plumwood’s Dialogical Ethical Ontology and Its Consequences for a Place-based Ethic,” \textit{Ethics & the Environment} 14, 2009: 39-55), and naturalist advocates, such as John Copp Jr. and Ian Barbour. Environmental theologians in particular often find process philosophy most appealing. In the beginning of my academic career, I also studied process philosophy, and agree with the defenders about its strengths, although its limits in global political use turned my focus towards another direction.
represent what is. By not subscribing to substantialist ontology, process philosophy entirely denies essentialism in which things have natures apart from their relations by which they are organised: physical and mental actions are not distinguished, and relationality is the basis for anything to happen or to become – that is, to be.

One reason for environmentalists to prefer process thought is its ability to break down the dichotomy between moral and factual reality without confusing their different roles. Moral reality and the laws of nature are intertwined: the laws of nature are relative to the activity of entities and to every novelty that comes into exist through process. In the process of becoming, the ‘many’ in the world are re-unified to create a new ‘one’; all the partners of that process are active, none passive. This holds for self-formation of the moral agent, too. But at the same time, this precisely causes problems for process ethics to join in general moral discussion. For example, event-based ontology questions the temporal duration of self (especially of intentionality), which is conceived to be a prerequisite of the integrity of an agent. But Whitehead does not dispense with personal identity, but sees it extended to the conditions of its being realised, the relationships in which the becoming of a person again and again takes place. The Whiteheadian environmentalist Frederic Ferré, for example, argues against the critics that distinction categories of subjective and objective are valorised by the substance metaphysics in modern ethics, which is just grounded on a certain metaphysical system to which process ontology is an alternative. In the moral self, the dynamic of relationships, two “poles” are involved (subjective and objective, mental and physical, or cognitive and emotional), but in the process and action they are never separable. Therefore, persons are “capable of initiating causal changes in the physical world by making mental judgements guided by ideal norms”, but not without being embodied (physically relational), which is a requirement of agency. Ferré even argues that the two great threats to environmental ethics, on the metaethical level, namely scepticism and irrealism, remain valid only if the standard modernist metaphysics is accepted. Although the practical power of

378 Nothing but happening is real: “how an actual entity becomes constitutes what the actual entity is.” Whitehead 1978, 23. All other things that “are in any sense of ‘existence’, are derived by abstractions from actual (entities).” Whitehead 1978, 113.

379 “[N]either nature nor life can be understood unless wefuse them together as essential factors in the composition of ‘really real’ things whose inter-connections and individual characters constitute the universe.” Whitehead 1956, 205. “A single fact in isolation is the primary myth [...] Connectedness is of the essence of all things of all types.” Whitehead 1956, 12-3.

380 Whitehead 1978, 21. “The many become one, and are increased by one.” This depicts the link with metaphysical holism and points to the difference between holism and relationalism.


382 Ferré 2001, 105-7. He thinks subjectivism in ethics could work if only subjects were seen as parts of “the reality of multiple subjective centers of real relationships”.

383 He follows here Whitehead’s idea of dipolar process.

384 “Persons are moral observers in virtue of their mental poles; they are moral agents in virtue of their embodiment as physical organisms.” Ferré 2001, 236. Ferré’s aim to construct a relational view on a metaphysical basis faces the problem similar to many others: for those who do not share the insight, revisions sound like preaching to be either accepted or bypassed. See Ferré 2001, 59-62.

385 This is a theme of several of his books: Being and Value: Toward a Constructive Postmodern Metaphysics (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), Knowing and Value: Towards a Constructive Postmodern Epistemology (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), and Living and Value: Toward a Constructive Postmodern Ethics (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).
Process metaphysics can be questioned, Ferré is correct in arguing that ontological presuppositions remain influential in all frameworks, and the value of ontological debates should not be underestimated.

Process philosophy and Asian Buddhist philosophy are often cited as mutually supportive with regard to the relational moral self and derivative ethics. Therefore, I take here a Confucian virtue approach to agency to exemplify Asian philosophy. According to classical Confucian writings, the self is intrinsically relational in two senses: personhood is relational by nature, and particular persons are constituted by their relationships. A biological organism becomes a person by entering into relationships with others: one realises one’s humanity by realising “inborn capacities to enter into a network of responsibilities”, such as feelings of compassion, shame, courtesy and a sense of right and wrong. The constitutive dispositions of identity are not traits simpliciter, but traits performed for particular people: among whom we choose to spend our time is not without consequences for our very identity. But besides being relational as a person, relations are necessary in order to become a moral agent.

The Confucian philosopher David Wong highlights the fact that the sphere of constitutive relations includes both social and environmental relationships. Persons are not autonomous as individual selves, but they influence the constitution of the collective agency (and autonomy) by cultivating certain relationships rather than others. Continuous retraining and reshaping the character in harmonious relations with nature is necessary for both the cultivation of one’s identity and for getting nurture from nature. In the right kind of relationships an agent can increase his wisdom and autonomy. Confucianism also respects the differences: “the way of humans” is distinct from “the way of Nature”, but both “ways” require each other and each other’s activity. This is called the “relational resonance” between humans and nature. If relations rely on one’s actions, which in turn shape one’s agency, then, however comprehensive one’s autonomy is, the agent can never see a general rule or universal moral claim as an absolute “rightness” (associated with yi). Relations with particular places and commitments are ethical necessities that force one to keep on searching for what is right. Relationships never become indifferent. Moral agency

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386 Whiteheadian process philosophy covers, in my view, most of the beneficial ideas of Buddhist philosophy “translated” into Western environmental philosophy. For those interested in the ontological relationality of agency, however, Buddhist philosophy is worth examining.


388 “Who I am, partly depends on the situation I am in and on the company I am keeping.” Wong 2004, 422-3; Identity is constituted by relationships, first, in sense that personal traits develop by the influence of particular others, and second, in sense that the context for the traits to be specified is formed by relationships. Hourdequin & Wong 2005, 20-1.

389 “[P]ersons need the help of others to develop as agents.” This is called the developmental sense of relationality. Wong 2004, 421.

390 Wong 2004, 428-9. According to Wong, relational autonomy is an alternative to a Kantian understanding of autonomy but is not in opposition to autonomy as such. As an ideal, “autonomy [...] means the possession of context-invariant traits consisting in abilities to feel and act ethically.” (p. 429).


392 Tao 2004, 6, 8.

393 What is right in the world is always variable, but sensitivity to what each context calls for as a trait is itself not dependent on the context but on something absolute. Hourdequin & Wong 2005, 21-2.
thus calls for two virtues: the virtue of epistemic flexibility and the virtue of some firm, non-relational truth, but not a general principle. In the Confucian context such reality is called yi. Confucian insights can offer some resources for constructing a ‘third way’ between approaches that separate humans and nature and those that adopt holism or homogeneity. One fascinating idea is that the structures of the world and agency (human and other) are interconnected in a way that makes it impossible to absolutely distinguish between the conditions of action and the actions themselves. Environmental values emerge from the relational self.

2.6 PARALLEL AGENDAS TOWARDS RELATIONAL AGENCY

Naturalists and constructivists criticise the predominant notion from philosophically opposite directions. In their hardwired forms, social constructivism and evolutionary ethics also share a common problem as alternatives to exceptional moral agency from the point of view of the moral aspirations of environmental ethics: their reductionist natural or social explanations of agency seem to threaten the notion of moral autonomy required for responsibility. The hardwired forms suffer, in terms of Mary Midgley, from the scientific ideal of simplicity. Midgley exemplifies an environmental moral philosopher who can be categorised both as an evolutionary ethicist and an ecofeminist, but who criticises both. According to her, human exceptionality is problematic not only for its reference to human superiority but also because exceptionality is about how we think or study human beings in the first place. In her Beast and Man (1978) Midgley criticised the main explanations of human nature as a form of reductionism. A “full paper theory” of human nature reduces human nature and actions to causalities, especially genetic determinants and neurophysiological activity, while a “blank paper theory” reduces them to the social determinants and the material body is just a platform for social interaction and action. 

“In his dealings with the world the gentleman is not invariably for or against anything. He is on the side of what is yi.” Confucius: Analects 4:10.

394 Hourdequin & Wong 2005, 31. The question of partiality and impartiality is a question of scale, not an either-or question.

395 Tao 2004, 8.

396 “The relational approach differs from the instrumentalist […]. For one thing, the non-human world enters into human identity more deeply than at the level of answering to human interests. […] Our environments, as Xunzi points out, shape our sense of possibility and therefore our sense of what there is to value. Furthermore, […] it is not that the non-human has value simply because it serves human interests, and it is not that we have to regard the non-human as having value independently of our existence. Rather, the non-human can be so implicated in who we are that its having value is a necessary condition of our having value.” Hourdequin & Wong 2005, 27.


cultural constructions to take place. On the level of moral agency, a full paper explanation is thus biologically reductionist, while blank paper explanation reduces moral agency to social life through particular experiences, which implies moral relativism. Midgley invited social philosophers to learn from natural explanations, but she was not pleased with the way natural sciences were used during her time. According to her, neither theory can alone explain the agency of a human animal. Processes providing actions should be seen from a broader perspective of the mundane interactivity between biological and social determinants. Explanations of human nature determined by either biological or social causes, nature or nurture are both implausible: “people have been strangely determined to take genetic and social explanations as alternatives instead of using them to complete each other.”

Environmentalists drawing from evolutionary naturalism and ecofeminist constructivism agree with this and criticise simplified explanations that strictly separate physical causalities from mental reasons for action. They call for careful investigation of the mutual interrelationship between moral reasoning and its physical, ecological and social conditions. Common to environmentalists in both groups is an aspiration beyond dichotomising material-biological and mental-cultural influences in human agency – in contrast to the main line of thought of their group. They often call for wide-ranging recognition of the constituents of agency, which overlap mental and corporeal and connect internal and external determinants. This makes their argumentations in environmental ethics remarkably close to each other. In spite of drawing from opposing philosophical traditions, they challenge hard interpretations of their own tradition by making use of each other’s perspectives, especially when trying to resist reductionism. Ecofeminists call for the meaning of the material body and ecological relationships, while philosophers of biology seek for an understanding of the psychological and social constitution of agency. So, besides negative parallelism, environmentalists on both the naturalist and the constructivist side can be seen to share a positive parallel call to make a shift towards a more relational understanding of agency and to reconsider the nature of autonomy. Relationality is an important perspective in Midgley’s view, especially in her view of moral community and agency. She does not deny species-barriers but argues that all communities are mixed in the sense that they “are themselves multi-species ones.” Hence, the study of moral reasoning should take into account the fact that human animality and ecological relationality influence the moral agent both through her innate animal instincts and the community in which she grows and lives – a community that includes various nonhuman others, too.

As parallel agendas, evolutionary and ecofeminist perspectives on moral agency share similar types of challenges as well as parallel proposals to overcome these challenges. Four aspects are worth mentioning. First, both ecofeminists and evolutionary naturalists in environmental ethics claim that human nature is not

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399 Midgley 1978, 3-23, 54-5, 162-3.
401 Midgley 1978, xxxviii.
402 A widely shared view among ecofeminists, for example, is that they have “a great deal to learn from the natural sciences, especially evolution and ecology.” Peterson 2006, 391.
403 Midgley 1998, 111.
essential or fixed. The contextuality of an agent is thus not just a conceptual notion, but a real one. Humanness can be approached as an empirical phenomenon in terms of evolutionary, ecological and social factors and cultural definitions. For evolutionary reasons, not even naturalists think that human nature could be directly used as a foundation for objective moral concepts in the sense of universal moral realism. Deriving criteria for moral status from human nature without qualifications also seems arbitrary. Second, despite the fact that naturalist and constructivist approaches emphasise different factors in explanation, environmentalists in both groups try to soften reductionist explanations on the one hand and steer clear of a dualist understanding of the nature of the human agent on the other. They attack the idea of dividing an agent into evolutionarily or socially explainable “full” human nature and “blank” freedom that guarantees moral autonomy. Instead, they often approach considering moral agency as a socio-ecological constitution: a plausible condition of moral agency overlaps social and biological determinants without reduction.

Third, according to both, human conditions are not insignificant for the concept of moral agency. Earthly contingencies that determine human nature also in a way determine human moral agency. If an earthly being can be a moral agent, her morality is earthly limited. But human contingencies compromise the modern notion of freedom. However, many environmentalists among both lines of thought seem to keep on arguing that both moral responsibility and the critical point of view of ethics can be performed by moral agency. A shared supposition between them is that the absolute notion of freedom is not necessary for moral responsibility. Fourth, as contextualities are inescapable for moral agents, they must not be underrated in a moral theory. On the contrary, a detached view of moral reasoning may cause harms for ethics: a glorious concept of moral agency dazzles moral theories into not recognising the logic of domination (emphasised especially by ecofeminists) nor the meanings of evolutive mechanisms in their reasoning (emphasised especially by sociobiologists). On a more theoretical level, a question arises whether causalities play a role in moral reasoning, and whether the concept of a moral reason for action can be plausibly defined without reduction. Is the difference between causal explanations and moral reasons for action a conceptual one, do they belong to separate realities, or is there some third interpretation in between? The problem for hardwired types of evolutionary naturalism and feminist constructivism that concerns environmentalists drawing from them has to do with the implied reductive

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404 An environmentalist and philosopher of science, Patrick Curry argues that both naturalists and culturalists who do not overcome the nature/culture distinction carry on the same universalising impulse that sustained dualism. The reduction of agency to any single aspect resembles essentialism. Curry exemplifies the recent tones of discussion, as he calls for overcoming the discourse that falls into two camps in ethical theory: “realists (ontologically speaking) or objectivists (epistemologically)” and “relativists or constructionists respectively”. He calls this position that opposes both camps relational pluralism but argues that similar aspirations have been put forward under different titles by, for example, Barbara Herrnstein Smith, Bruno Latour, William James, Isaiah Berlin and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Curry 2008, 51-3

405 This question is, of course, one that interests moral philosophers widely, and I do not claim that it would only concern environmental philosophers. On the contrary, it is interesting that, for instance, a great Finnish moral philosopher Georg Henrik von Wright contributed to this issue in his late essays collected in *In the Shadow of Descartes* (Springer Science+Business Media, B.V., 1998). Lilli Alanen’s analysis on this work partly contributes to this discussion. Alanen 2017. See also fn. 483.
explanation of morality. Both highlight the explanatory force of empirical facts, however from the different origins of epistemology and science: morality as reflecting either the survival mechanisms adapted in the brain or social mechanisms for emancipation from oppressive structures.\textsuperscript{406}

With regard to the role of explanations, these strategies seem to aspire to a third view in between reducing moral reason to factual explanations on the one hand and making an easy solution by just conceptually diving them without qualification on the other. The most significant point of convergence for parallel decisions is that central to their aspirations is a non-individualist understanding of agency. This does not, however, simply refer to metaphysical or moral holism, which is common in environmental ethics,\textsuperscript{407} but to the use of the scientific and anthropological notions of the complex mechanisms of eco-social interactions. A shared claim is that the role of these interactions in the processes of deliberation and action should be taken into account in the conception of moral agency. Both approaches call for the focus to be placed on the quality of relationships (either ecological or social) that make us moral agents. They also argue that the interactions in these relationships should be included in the sphere of moral actions: as they influence the constitution of our own agency, they are – even in a more strict and concrete sense than Kant thought – duties to ourselves. The role we play in our ecological place, as well as our socio-cultural role, does not just influence the “world out there”, but also our own manifestation of moral agency.

On the basis of what has been said in this chapter I argue that evolutionary environmental ethics and ecofeminist social constructivism share, first, the target of criticism in the modernist conception of moral agency, and, second, are parallel with regard to their aspirations to resist the reductionist explanations of the hardwired forms of their own traditions. Enough evidence exists to claim that the common features in the ways I which environmentalists in each group criticise the modern myth and their own traditions show that they share aspirations that move in parallel directions. The relevant question at this point is, I think, whether they could be seen as parallel agendas towards a converged view at some point. On the grounds of my examinations, I argue that this is a justified supposition. My proposal is that the point in which they converge can be articulated as an ecologically relational notion of moral agency.

Considered as parallel lines of thought directed towards a convergent aim opens up new prospects to revoke traditional dichotomies. In the context of environmental

\textsuperscript{406} Peterson 2001, 57; Plumwood 1993, 132. Val Plumwood, for example, approaches the evolutionary continuity thesis by arguing that a continuity between mind and nature can be defended on the grounds of intentionality that can also be found in nature, but she explicitly denies that this works as a similarity criterion. Intentionality “provides a way to realise continuity without assimilation” and it does not allow argument for moral consideration on the grounds of similarity, “[b]ecause intentional systems are differentiated in terms of kind rather than of degree of variation along the same axis.”

\textsuperscript{407} For metaphysical holism, see section 2.5. Moral holism is defended, for example, in land ethics defended by Aldo Leopold and J. Baird Callicott, and moral models that heavily appeal to James Lovelock’s Gaia theory. The quest for ontological relationality also implies a different view about the concept of nature. See Kirkman 2002, 23-4. The focus in this study is in the human operations of reasoning, and the moral obligations that can be approached by those operations, while ontological relationality would turn the focus to justifications derived from metaphysics or empirical science.
ethics, authors on both sides are inclined to question the hardwired conceptions of their own philosophical framework and seek for more modest positions. These positions could be called chastened constructionism⁴⁰⁸ and soft naturalism. Common to them is that they aspire to restrain reductionism of any kind and to take seriously the fundamental interactivity between various factors constitutive for agency. Conceptually, it is not an easy task. According to my analysis, the initial steps taken along this path, however, show a potentiality to elucidate the nature of moral agency in a way that reveals hidden processes as parts of moral reasoning without violating the conditions of moral realism and the authority of ethics. If my hypothesis is correct, examination of the lines of thought towards which these critical approaches aspire can unveil new possibilities for improving the theoretical basis of moral discourse concerning environmental issues. I also suppose that aspirations to consider moral agency as relational are not philosophically insignificant. On the contrary, they may appear to have interesting conceptual implications in philosophy of mind and metaethics, or they may contribute to the discussion on the theory of ethics by introducing new insight.

Considering the general problems of environmental ethics, the proposed conceptual shift is worth exploring, even if clear representatives that explicitly perform this common aspiration would be few. The focus will thus now be turned from the distinctive features to the common aim to articulate the conception of moral agency that exceeds both hardwired constructivist and naturalist explanations and adopts, instead, a relational conception of moral agency.⁴⁰⁹ Such a view tries to relate agency to both earthly determinants and cultural constraints and to understand their role in the human mechanisms of reasoning and motivation. In order to understand what is possible or desirable for a moral agent, the complex web of interactions taking place in the agent's operations when an act is performed should be recognised and respected. In this discussion, naturalists tend to focus especially on the natural factors constitutive for voluntary operations. Motivation, purpose-giving, meaning-generating, valuing and intending are not separable from the representational operations of perception, cognitive processes and sensory awareness, or biologically evolved and physiological inclinations.⁴¹⁰ Constructivists focus on relationships constitutive for cognitive operations, such as perception and knowledge formation. Social, cultural and moral commitments and practices influence what satisfies the conditions of knowledge: affections, emotions and valuations, for example, are involved through representational operations. Knowledge is not a question of whether our “computational” operations work correctly.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁸ Peterson’s own notion of “chastened constructionism” is a moderately feminist conception of humans. I shall use the term in a similar sense. Ecofeminists use also the terms “constrained constructivism” (Katherine Hayle) and “non-reductive realism” (Kate Soper) in quite a similar sense. See, Hayle 1995, and Soper 1995.

⁴⁰⁹ There are also several approaches that straightforwardly attempt to parallel (constructivist) feminist and Darwinist notions of relationality. See, e.g. S. Harding and M. Hintikka (eds.), Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science (Kluwer 2003); Elizabeth Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism, (Indiana University Press 1994); and Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power (Duke University Press 2005).

⁴¹⁰ See, for example, de Waal 2005, 177-81, 227-9; de Waal 2006, 161-181.

⁴¹¹ For arguments concerning relational types of feminist epistemology, see Code 2006a; Harding 1998; Longino 2002; Plumwood 2002, Hekman 1999. They are inspired by social feminist epistemology.
If the constitutive elements for agency are relationships by nature, it is misleading to conceptualise agency as something demarcated under the skin of an individual (agent). Operations manifesting agency are better seen to take place in a communal network than in the individual mind. There are elements in the discussion that seem to overlap with discussion on collective agency. But unlike common theories of collective agency, authors in environmental ethics emphasise the fact that the nonhuman partners of a collective must not be excluded: the collective agency involves both human and nonhuman, living and non-living others. It is thus not a collective in the traditional sense, but rather, ecologically structured manifestations of agency. There are various types of influential relationships. But as the functioning (which reminds one of natural ecology) of such complex collectives, or mixed communities in Midgley’s terms, influence the very manifestations of agency, moral reasoning and motivation should also be seen as constituted in a structure that extends to relevant others “beyond the skin”.

Experiences of place, weather and landscape, as well as the consumption of ecosystem services (breathing, eating, etc.), for instance, are not irrelevant for moral identity, but are instead heavily involved in the ways that moral reasoning and valuing take place. The meanings and values of external things are formulated in the agent’s mind not simply by voluntary actions, nor are they just given by processes that implement their existence. Meanings and values may be explained, for instance, as outcomes of semantic relationships between internal and external things. But meanings do influence moral activity: the things one loves have a different influence on the evaluation of one’s actions than the things one hates, or things that one hardly acknowledges. The approach to agency constituted in mixed communities thus calls for some new perspectives that may also open up theoretically insightful possibilities. The external aspects on which agency depends highlights the role of the respect for material environment: the normative meaning of ethics relies heavily on the conditions in which moral agency can be manifested, and the conditions in which an agent becomes and remains responsible. I argue that examination to identify the potential point of converge as a shared aim for ecofeminist and evolutionary environmentalists can clarify the problems concerning the ability of ethics to deal with the external material world. A successful definition of non-individualistic agency would also have implications in discussions beyond environmental ethics, for

formulated by Hartsock, Harding and Haraway. See Hartsock 1998; Harding 1991, 105-187; Harding 1998; Haraway 1988. Besides a particularly feminist epistemology, some ecofeminists refer to indigenous views of place-based knowing and, for example, the pragmatisms of Quine and Putnam. The relationship between ecofeminism and pragmatism is interesting. For example, a prominent pragmatist philosopher Susan Haack argues against mainstream feminist epistemology, but Haack and some ecofeminists, such as Lorraine Code, have much in common. See Haack 1993.

412 This refers, partly, to collective notions of agency, but also to notions with timely extension, such as relationships resulting in genetic or cultural development, and ecological networks of the agent. The collective account of agency is under vivid discussion among such philosophers as Michael Bratman, John Searle, Raimo Tuomela, Philip Pettit and David Copp.

413 On semantic relationalism, see e.g. Kit Fine, Semantic Relationism (Malden, Oxford, Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2007).

414 Preston, for instance, acknowledges this fact as an important one for ethics. See Preston 2009, 176, 180, 182.
instance, concerning collective agency and possibilities of agent-based virtue ethics.\textsuperscript{415}

Revisions called for by empirical natural and social sciences form a challenge for traditional concepts of autonomy and reasoning, and perhaps for moral reason and autonomy of ethics, too. But such a call cannot be bypassed just on the grounds of its possible threat to traditional self-understanding of ethics. Criticism against modern exceptionality encourages us to pose questions, first of all, concerning the moral agents: Are human agents the only mixtures of natural causality and free finality on earth? And are the two realms about human activity as separable as usually thought in modern ethics? Is it possible to think of natural (non-moral, causally explainable) and moral (non-natural, requiring reason-giving explanation) activities as interactively dependent on each other? A negative answer to the first calls for recognising animal agency in a continuum with human moral agency, while a negative answer to the second calls for revising an understanding of the processes required for moral deliberation and motivation, and hence, the responsibility and autonomy of the agent. On a more theoretical level, suspicion against the common interpretation of responsibility and autonomy as concepts concerning an individual agent is challenging. However modest this suspicion is, it brings about discussion about stable truths and reasons for action. The challenging implications for moral theory carried by hardwired naturalism and constructivism remain under discussion. I shall return to them in chapters 4 and 5.

\textsuperscript{415} My supposition is that especially the possible implications for neo-Aristotelian and agent-based virtue ethics might be groundbreaking. Problems of deriving all normative qualities from virtues and the relationship between the agent’s motivation and external qualities of actions, for example, are discussed in Nancy E. Snow (ed.), \textit{Oxford Handbook on Virtue} (Oxford University Press 2018; especially part III: Contemporary Virtue Ethics and Theories of Virtue). See, especially, Pettigrove 2018.
3 RELATIONAL MORAL AGENCY

3.1 INTRODUCTION: AGENCY IN THE LIGHT OF EMPIRICAL SCIENCES

Parallel strategies in environmental ethics show that there is a specific need to reconceptualise moral agency and to extend the scope of relationships on which moral agency relies and by which moral deliberation and action is realised. The relationality of an agent seems inevitable in the sense of both natural ecological relationships and social relationships. The problems of modern ethics to normatively justify conducts about the agent’s material and ecosystemic relationships reflect the modernist idea of exceptional moral agency, which is criticised at both ends of the long table of environmental philosophical discussion. The call for the conceptual shift to take the relationality of an agent as constitutive for her agency has been proposed among those drawing from the naturalist philosophy of biology as well as those drawing from constructivist feminist ethics. Exceptional moral agency is challenged by emphasising either human animality or the cultural embeddedness of knowledge, reasoning and autonomous choices. But at both ends of challenges, the special target of criticism concerns the division between the impacts of nature and nurture in the very processes of implementing human agency. The interactivity between material and mental, evolutive and social is seen as constitutive for agency and for processes providing action. But if ecological structures have an impact in agency, ecology should not be considered just as a value of nature or as an object of moral instruction. The agent’s mental capacities are structured relationally in real ecological contexts.

In this chapter, the relational shift will be studied from a new perspective. I shall bring together hints of empirical proofs and philosophically articulated positions about the relational aspects of agency. By this I wish to take a few steps towards an articulated conception of ecologically relational agency, as it still remains largely unarticulated as a comprehensive view. My hope is that such articulation would clarify the interdisciplinary field that has remained little systematically studied and would help moral philosophers to get involved in discussion with natural and social scientists.

Human morality fascinates not only philosophers, but also evolutionary scientists, anthropologists, psychologists, and cognitive scientists. Since moral deliberation and action represent the most complex human activity, exact explanations of morality are eagerly pursued. Recent findings commonly highlight the fundamental meaning of complex relationships in evolutionary processes (at the levels of both individual phenotypes and populations), as well as human development and mental operations.

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416 As Mary Midgley famously puts it: “We are not just rather like animals; we are animals.” Midgley 1978, xxxii.
417 See section 2.4.5.
418 Because of the huge possibilities such an explanation could open up, for instance, in the field of virtual intelligence and robotics, empirical research is also motivated to bring out plausible findings.
Relational moral agency

(at the psychological, social and cultural levels). I shall ask here, what does it then mean in the descriptive sense that the agency is relational?

Scientific perspectives on the human mind may challenge conceptions of agency that have been formulated in philosophy in the light of outdated scientific understandings. But they also challenge the conceptual relationship between factual and moral language. In ethical discussions, a wide gap has mainly divided modern theories that defend the autonomous, free and rational core of an individual moral agent (such as traditional Kantianism) and theories that reduce moral agency to either material or social determinants.419 But such a sharp distinction suffers from a scientifically implausible view of human nature and action.

According to current scientific understanding, external material and social factors play more profound roles in mental processes that are important for moral agency than has previously been thought. But the influence is not simply causal or one-directional: scientific evidences increasingly emphasise the role of mutually interrelated and interacting factors in mental operations. Therefore, I argue, biological, neuroscientific, and psychological notions are closely connected with philosophical discussions on the roles of knowing, volition and emotions for moral agency. Together they sketch an idea of relational agency, which will be defended here. According to this idea of relationality, mental operations are complex and tie up various mental and bodily processes, as well as external factors.420 I shall argue that taking seriously evidences about the interactive constitution of human mental operations requires that the conception of agency in ethics be relationally revised. If I am right, this may have philosophical implications, too. Strict division between representational and dynamic mental operations (or cognition and conation), for instance, may become obscured. Agency considered to emerge from interactive processes between the physical and social in both individual, and wider ecological and cultural levels fundamentally challenges the idea of an isolated, untouched notion of the free moral agent – but also challenges hard determinist notions of agency. Such views also call into question the ordinary definitions of the scope of ethics. If ecological dynamics are constitutive for agency, then moral reasoning, autonomy and the ability to set moral ends are embodied and embedded in ecological relationships: these activities should be under moral evaluation.421 Ethics that is concerned about the

419 See, for example, evolutionary psychology or hardwired social constructivism. It is worth acknowledging that Kant also criticised moral reason and removed much of the human exceptionality from the agent. However, by pruning pure moral reason from an agent, Kant actually strengthened the role of the remaining “core” of moral agency as the untouched autonomy of a person – the mark of human uniqueness. The usual understanding seems to be that reductionism entails relativism, and hence, reductionist theories are not efficient tools for environmental ethics. Theories carrying on the Enlightenment tradition are recognised as politically most useful.

420 The themes are currently much discussed under topics like extended mind (e.g. Clark & Chalmers 1998 and Rowlands 1999, 2009b), embodied cognition (Varela, Rosch & Thompson 1991; Lakoff & Johnson 1999), externalism about mind (Noé 2004; Rowlands 2003) knowledge as an ability (Hyman 2015) and enactivism (Varela et al 1991; Rowlands 2006, 2010 and 2013; Noé 2004; Urban 2015). See also Ernst Sosa’s “Skepticism and the Internal/External Divide” in J. Greco & E. Sosa (eds.), The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology (Malden, Oxford, Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 1999): 145-57. On my conception of relationality, the different aspects are not, however, unified, in contrast to some ontologically relational positions. For criticism against the project of unification, see e.g. Kirkman 2009.

421 Some environmental ethicists seem to argue against both the exceptional and the reductionist conception of moral agency and, thus, make initial steps towards this kind of view. See, for instance, Shepard 1977; Preston 2003, Borgmann 2006; Preston 2009; Preston 2010, 7. The intimate bond
ability to solve practical environmental problems cannot dismiss the quality of mechanisms of cooperation among partners that are constitutive for agency.

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify what is distinctive in calling moral agency ecologically relational and to justify using it as an alternative concept for exceptional agency.\textsuperscript{422} I shall do this by briefly sketching selected examples of current discussions about the role of external environmental and social relationships for human agency taken from different fields of relevant sciences. I shall also ask what kinds of conceptual shifts would such perspectives involve. It is worth acknowledging that studies in the referred fields move rapidly on, and it is not possible to thoroughly explore these studies within the limits of this study. In order to give a somewhat more coherent view of some basic questions, the selection of examples does not contain only the most recent examples. They are brought together here in order to elucidate scientifically plausible grounds for reconsidering the conception of moral agency. The overview will show that pieces of the wide range of discussions are in fact loosely connected, although originally, they have been provided for some other discussion. Each example will be, in this context, considered only from the viewpoint of the constructive argument of this study. Three aspects of the concept of agency will be distinguished in order to approach the idea of ecologically relational agency: the being and identity of an agent (section 3.2), cognitive operations and rationality (section 3.3), and acting, which refers especially to intentions and autonomy (section 3.4).

3.2 BEING RELATIONAL

3.2.1 RELATIONAL TONES IN EVOLUTIONARY EXPLANATIONS

‘Organisms do not adapt to their environments; they construct them out of the bits and pieces of the external world.’\textsuperscript{423}

In order to sketch approaches to the relational nature of human nature and human mental operations, I shall introduce examples of arguments in favour of context sensitivity in evolutionary development, ultra-sociality and social cognition,\textsuperscript{424} embodied cognition and the extended mind thesis,\textsuperscript{425} and the ethics of place grounded on them.\textsuperscript{426} Taken as perspectives on philosophical anthropology they elucidate the role of various interactions for the biology, psychological development, cognitive

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\textsuperscript{423} Lewontin 2001, 64.

\textsuperscript{424} Especially the meaning of ultra-sociality for human development defended by psychologist Michael Tomasello, and the mutual explanatory role between biological and cultural, e.g. moral, systems, defended by social psychologist Jonathan Haidt.

\textsuperscript{425} Defended e.g. by the philosophers of mind Mark Rowlands and Mark Johnson.

\textsuperscript{426} Argued e.g. by philosophers Mick Smith and Christopher Preston.
operations and moral capacities of a human agent. Common to those who argue for these perspectives is an awareness of the complexity of natural human processes, and a willingness to find explanations that can combine the relevant perspectives. Therefore, these scientists are open to interdisciplinary approaches, and some of them seek a synthesis between biological, eco-social and cultural factors to explain their coevolution. Together their arguments give an overview about the range of discussions, according to which human nature is generated and developed by relational processes. The purpose is to ask whether they provide supporting evidence for my hypothesis that considering human moral agency bound to ecological and social relationships does not imply debunking ethics or moral responsibility.

Evolutionary explanations of morality used by hardwired naturalists are grounded either on reciprocal altruism (altruistic behaviour leads to evolutionary gains through reciprocal responses by others) or inclusive fitness through kin selection (although I lose, some of my kin gain). These evolutionary approaches are criticised because of their genocentric view of inheritance. An alternative route to define morality emphasises the complex development of human nature and agency. For example, developmental systems theory (further DST) focuses on ontogeny, and niche construction theory (further NCT) focuses on ecological inheritance. DST and NCT share the basic view that inheritance and ontogeny are processes in which various interrelationships and mechanisms of ecological dynamics play a decisive role. In the background there is the notion of the epigenetic regulation of gene expression. Genomes are activated and regulated not only by genetic determination, but by cellular processes, which also include various signals from both internal and external environments. These “non-genetic” influences are sometimes generational. Epigenetic evolution is thus not just about passing genes on to the inheritor under the selective pressure of the environment, but also about ways to read and express the genes that are transmitted. In a sense, information acquiring can also be placed on the level of ontogeny.

DST criticises standard evolutionary theory about overemphasised genocentrism. Nature and nurture are integrated in developmental systems: the ontogenic information required by evolution is neither in the genes nor in the environment alone. As an epigenetic view DST describes evolutionary changes as the result of constructive interactions between various elements. Despite also being an independent theory, NCT can be used as an umbrella concept for various types of

427 Laland, Matthews & Feldman 2016, 192-3; Deane-Drummond 2014, 219; Sterelny 2001, 337.
428 DST has various interpretations, but among the most influential are those defended, for example, by Susan Oyama, Paul E. Griffiths and Russell D. Grey. The first modification put forward by Harvard biologist Richard Lewontin 1983 is often cited as the first proposal of the idea of niche construction in the broad sense. See Laland, Matthews & Feldman 2016, 192.
430 For more, see Oyama 1985.
431 “The life cycle of an organism is developmentally constructed, not programmed or preformed,” and “[i]t becomes into being through interactions between the organism and its surroundings as well as interactions within the organism.” Oyama, Griffiths & Grey 2001b, 4. For the cumulative cultural evolution that includes imitation and environmental engineering in NCT, see Sterelny 2001. DST gets support from the empirical findings of molecular biology. See Keller 2001, 299. For the theoretical backgrounds of DST, see Oyama 1985; Oyama, Griffiths & Grey 2001a.
theories that bridge the biological and cultural sciences.432 Broadly speaking, it argues for the dynamic co-evolution of genetic and non-genetic factors, also called ecological inheritance.433 Organisms and their ecological niches are intimately interdependent: in addition to environmental modification, the acts of an organism have an impact on genetic selection through niche construction. A definitive feature of niche construction is that there are “organism-induced changes in selection pressures in environments”.434

DST and NCT represent approaches that acknowledge the critical role of nongenetic inheritance: there is a link between nongenetic inheritance and the impact of an organism or group on genetic inheritance.435 DST highlights that in explanation the logical disjunction between genes and the environment, nature and nurture, or form and matter denies without justification the informational role of one or the other. But instead of simply replacing disjunction by conjunction with genes and the environment, or nature and nurture, it claims that complex systemic thinking is needed.436 NCT extends the view to populations and ecological structures. In this sense it includes philosophically more relevant elements than the standard externalist theory of evolution. One-directional causation should be, according to NCT, replaced by “reciprocal causation”. By claiming that “[n]iches are themselves part of the evolutionary process, so that an interactionist theory replaces an externalist theory” it brings the idea of ecological inheritance side by side with the genetic and cultural inheritance.437 This means that “(1) organisms modify environmental states in non-random ways, thereby imposing a systematic bias on the selection they generate [...]; (2) ecological inheritance strongly affects evolutionary dynamics [...] ; (3) acquired characters and byproducts become evolutionarily significant by affecting selective environments in systematic ways, and (4) the complementarity of organisms and their environments (traditionally described as ‘adaptation’) can be achieved through evolution by niche construction.”438

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432 Laland, Matthews & Feldman 2016, 195.
434 Kendal, Tehrani & Odling-Smee 2011. This distinguishes NCT from its relative concept, the extended phenotype, defended, e.g., by Richard Dawkins. For the comparison, see Laland, Matthews & Feldman 2016, 193-4.
435 Sterelny 2001, 337. It is worth recognising that NCT and DST take a normative stance to science in the form of science criticism. Although internal to science, their criticism against certain modes of biology emerges from an idea of epistemological objectivity that has an ethical character, comparable with the idea of strong objectivity by feminist epistemologies. Van der Weele 1999, 135; van der Weele 2001, 360. Cf. e.g. Harding 1998 and 2004a.
436 A physicist, molecular biologist and feminist thinker Evelyn Fox Keller, for instance, argues that such a simple turn would ignore the informing role of the organism’s internal environment. Keller 2001, 300.
437 Deane-Drummond 2014, 220; Kendal, Tehrani & Odling-Smee 2011, 786. For standard externalism, the environment is “an external factor acting in order to select those internal properties that are most adapted to that environment”. Phenotypes and behavioural differences are thus explained by the “ultimate” category of natural selection, while “proximate” causes, such as niche construction, are disregarded. In contrast to that, NCT problematises the idea of “causation” and the distinction between proximate and ultimate causes. For causation and ecological inheritance in NCT, see Deane-Drummond 2014, 220; F. John Odling-Smee, “Niche Inheritance” in M. Pigliucci & G. Muller (eds.), Evolution: The Extended Synthesis (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010): 175-207.
438 Laland, Matthews and Feldman 2016, 192. Laland et al. refer to several other writings in their summarising list.
Nice construction, to which human intentional actions unavoidably take part, is thus an evolutionary process in its own right, possibly leading to more rapid adaptation than with evolution by selection.439 I argue that this perspective is topical from the point of view of the Anthropocene, which refers to the current fundamental human influence in the systems of nature. Already in the evolutionary history of early human societies, cooperation and sociality were vital components of the niche “that modified the social and biotic environments that changed selection pressures in those populations”. But the role they play in the development of human culture and agency today is increasingly decisive.440 Niche construction by cultural processes functions besides biologically evolved one and can also modify the selection of human genes. Ecological, social and cultural contexts form a “niche” for agential operations and direct the construction process of agency.441 Therefore, responsibility about future development and even evolution is addressed in everyday human life and actions, moral or nonmoral alike, if they influence these contexts. The influences of human actions are heavily loaded by responsibility for the moral future, regardless of whether the actions behind are considered morally relevant.

A currently plausible position is that natural organisms are “shaped by the interactions and experiences that the organism has earlier in life”.442 The relational interactivity between genetic and environmental influences is maintained by both DST and NCT and it calls for theoretical revisions concerning the developmental and evolutionary processes. Scholars today widely agree that cooperation between genes, environments and the organism’s own activity is crucial in explanations of selection.443 In the case of the most complex features required for moral agency, such as reasoning, the emotional capacity for intersubjectivity, and sociality, complex interactivity and feedback mechanisms play especially decisive roles.444 Human behavioural and symbolic systems have evolutionary significance.445

From these examples, three philosophical conclusions for the conceptual revision of human moral agency can be derived. First, since organism-mediated environmental modifications influence selection pressures, the evolution and development of organisms (humans included) complexly depends on the actions of

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440 Deane-Drummond 2014, 222.

441 Rowlands 2005, 7.


445 It is therefore worth noting that information acquiring should also be placed on three interrelated levels: “population genetic, ontogenic, and cultural”. Deane-Drummond 2014, 221.
other organisms (humans included) with which they share ecological niches. Interaction with other organisms modifies even our cognition, motivation, and capacities of reasoning and reflection. Therefore, human agency, (and not just human “nature”) is intimately interconnected with the ecological webs in which humans live.

Second, since humans modify their own inheritance – willingly or not – through their own influence in niche construction by culturally learned habits and symbolic systems, everyday habits, contingent conditions, social interactions and cultural symbols are, among many other things, responsible for the future of human capabilities and our moral capacities. Implications for the self-understanding of ethics seem evident. Accordingly, conceptions of morally relevant actions, and criteria for the moral standing of nonhuman organisms should be critically evaluated and revised. Third, human uniqueness, namely features that have made our species extremely successful, has to do with the strong role of interactivity exploited in human communities: from quite an early stage of evolution, humans had more nongenetic ways of transmitting information and engineering the environment than other species (for instance imitating), and they formed extremely cooperative groups and communities with shared goals.

On the part of philosophers and cognitive scientists interested in evolutionary mechanisms, relational tones have been developed in several contexts, perhaps most clearly in enactivism. In *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Varela, Thompson and Rosch 1991), early defenders of enactivism reformulated the post-Darwinian idea of “evolution by natural drift” under four points in which relationality already plays a central role: First, “a network capable of a rich repertoire of self-organizing configurations” is the basic unit of evolution. Second, “these configurations generate selection”, which is “an ongoing process of satisficing that triggers (but does not specify) change in the form of viable trajectories”. Third, the “mode of change of the unit of selection is the interwoven (nonoptimal) result of multiple levels of subnetworks of selected self-organized repertoires”. And fourth, “[t]he opposition between inner and outer causal factors is replaced by a coimplicative relation, since organism and medium mutually specify each other.” Replacing the adaptationist outline by articulated relational mechanisms of evolution involves a shift that has also wide implications in the evolutionary

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448 Sterelny 2001, 338, 334-5. It is worth noting, however, that contrary to both DST and NCT, Sterelny argues against the general idea of nongenetic inheritance, but appoints it to human cultural evolution. He argues that the ability to generate cumulative evolution is bound to the uniquely human ability of imitation. For more about imitation, see Tomasello 2014.

449 Cooperative groups adapted better to their environments as they learned by doing things together with others and influenced the development of the population by modifying their environment in expanded inheritance. This tendency became ever stronger, developing new levels of sociality by the unique ability of humans to imitate. Tomasello 2014, 191-2.
explanations of cognitive and other mental operations, and consequently in the
theories which these explanations influence.450

3.2.2 ULTRA-SOCIALITY IN EXPLANATIONS OF MORAL AGENCY
A sociobiologist E. O. Wilson predicted in the 1970s that a philosophical approach to
morality will be replaced by evolutionary psychological explanations. He believed that
it can be empirically revealed how biologically adapted emotive centres in the brain
guide moral intuitions. According to sociobiology, moral norms are also sociocultural
correlates of biologically evolved behaviour and, thus, are derived from biological
evolution. Even moral pluralism is thought to be explicable by evolved reactions of
the brain to different situations.451 However justified the criticism against the denial
of contingent factors in moral philosophy is, explanations of morality put forward by
sociobiologists contain serious problems due to the confusion between evolutionary
explanations and philosophical concepts. The explanations are, however, various.452
Despite this, I argue that empirical explanations currently put forward can valuably
enlighten the nature of human moral agency, which as such should be distinguished
from the question of evolved moral norms. According to the prominent evolutionary
biologist, Francisco J. Ayala, the exhibition of moral behaviour is natural for humans,
“because their biological makeup determines the presence of three necessary
conditions for ethical behavior: (i) the ability to anticipate the consequences of one’s
own actions; (ii) the ability to make value judgments; and (iii) the ability to choose
between alternative courses of action.”453 Cognitive and psychological abilities and
tendencies are prerequisites of a moral culture. Therefore, in order to critically
evaluate moral theories, it is important to understand how these abilities to deal with
moral issues or tendencies of commitment in fact function.

Evolutionary anthropologists, developmental and social psychologists and
cognitive scientists have recently targeted criticism against individualistic
conceptions of the mind and agency. The evolutionary anthropologist and
developmental psychologist Michael Tomasello, who scrutinises the psychological
backgrounds of human agency, is one of those who compellingly highlight the role of
interrelatedness for moral agency.454 Basing on the comparison between the
psychology of infants and chimpanzees he argues that the unique feature of the
human species is that we are not just social but ultra-social animals. Moral agency is,

they not only justify evolved moral intuitions but also pretend that “they are intuiting truths that are
independent of the contingencies of our evolved minds”. The sociobiological position is currently widely
criticised among philosophers of biology. See e.g. Ayala 2010.
452 Francisco J. Ayala, for example, argues that morality should be seen to have evolved as an
exaptation rather than as adaptation. Exaptation is a term launched by Stephen Jay Gould and Elisabeth
Vrba for the shift of function of a character that was shaped by natural selection for another function.
15. This is just one possibility of preserving the philosophical autonomy of ethics, and I suppose that
philosophers could get closer to evolutionary explanations without threatening the autonomy of ethics.
There are also midway positions between Ruse and Ayala.
454 Notable works on the theme are Tomasello’s A Natural History of Human Thinking (2014) and
A Natural History of Human Morality (2016).
according to him, a sign of human sociality evolved as a result from mutualistic cooperation, in which interactions amongst humans are beneficial to all.\textsuperscript{455} Interdependency causes ultra-social mutualism and explains how sociality takes form in our cognition, moral intuitions, and behaviour. It changes social behaviour, modifies cognitive processes, and explains much of the need to construct moral theories and find objectivity.\textsuperscript{456}

Tomasello’s studies, among others, show that many of the crucial features of human cognition and moral agency are explainable by capacities based on human ultra-sociality. Human agency requires capacities to understand others’ intentions, share attention and form joint intention with others in order to make changes in the world, and to identify oneself to the collective in order to enforce norms and conform to normative standards. According to Tomasello, two ecological changes in the evolutionary history of the human species forced humans to collaborate as equals and later, to develop group-mind and collective intentionality.\textsuperscript{457} The first was caused by the scarcity of resources attainable for separate individuals, by which collaboration became necessary for survival. By this, humans learned to perceive each other as equals when taking part in joined activities. Joined intentionality evolved because humans could not manage without joint action. Psychologically the adaptively proximate mechanisms were care and sympathy, which, in turn, are crucial for the development of distributive justice—found only in human agency.\textsuperscript{458} The meaning of collaboration for survival also entailed that the capability to form joint goals, a commitment to these goals, and trust in others became important. According to Tomasello, even at an early age young children conceive of themselves as partners of agency with joint goals and attention, and hence they care for each other’s welfare.\textsuperscript{459}

The second important change in evolutionary history was caused by demographic factors: competition between ad hoc collaborative foraging groups turned into tighter social groups and increasing population size. They, again, turned into tribal organisation, meaning that small active groupings together form a cultural super-group.\textsuperscript{460}

Ultra-social humans became group-minded: they identified themselves with a certain culture, actively conformed to others and enforced social norms on others. These features are unique to human sociality.\textsuperscript{461} Imitation skills developed active

\textsuperscript{455} Tomasello 2014, 188, 192-3. See also Tomasello 2016.

\textsuperscript{456} Tomasello 2014, 192-3.

\textsuperscript{457} Tomasello 2014, 191-2; Tomasello 2016, 123.

\textsuperscript{458} Tomasello 2016, 55, 129, 136; Tomasello 2014, 189. In his several studies comparing the collaboration between human infants and that of chimpanzees, Tomasello has found that “collaboration engenders equal sharing in children in a way it does not in chimpanzees”. See, for example, K. Hamann, F. Warneken and M. Tomasello, “Children, But Not Chipanzees Share More Equitably after Cooperation” (Nature 476, 2011: 328-331).


\textsuperscript{460} Tomasello 2014, 191; Tomasello 2016, 136-7. Human sociality can be compared even with super-organisms like ant colonies. However, in contrast to bee and ant ultra-sociality, which is based on kin selection, human ultra-sociality is based on special cognitive and motivational psychological mechanisms. Tomasello 2014,187; Haidt 2007, 1000-1.

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conformity to coordinate activities with ingroup strangers, and to display one’s group identity and commitment, revealing one’s trustworthiness and knowledgeableness as a partner. A human being needs to be accepted by the group. This binds them to actively identifying with their cultural group, to feel collective pride, shame and guilt, and to care for the group as an independent entity.\textsuperscript{462}

The main implications of human ultra-sociality are, according to Tomasello: (1) Humans can conceptualise the situation from various social perspectives, which means that they have a sense of “objectivity”. (2) Humans are somehow collectively self-reflective so that they can make conclusions about others’ intentional states, as well as their own. (3) Humans are capable of social self-monitoring from the normative perspectives and standards of the group and of others. This can be seen as the basis for human norms of rationality. The big difference between ape and human social interaction and cognitive processes is that whereas for great apes it is a matter of instrumental rationality aiming at individual gains, for humans it is about acting on “shared intentionality” and understanding the world “together as a kind of plural subject”.\textsuperscript{463} According to Tomasello, “without cognitive skills of collective intentionality, there could be no processes of moral self-regulation such as the reflective endorsement of moral decisions and a full-fledged sense of guilt”. This he considers to be crucial evidence for claiming that “moral judgments of right and wrong” were objectified from the social norms and cultural practices in a “moral-structural” way.\textsuperscript{464}

Tomasello’s viewpoint is interesting not just because it explains collective and relational backgrounds of agency in terms of evolutionary psychology but also because it gives empirical support for the philosophical importance of interdependence, the collective mind and joint intentionality. Especially the two levels of collective agency introduced by Raimo Tuomela, namely “I-mode” and “we-mode” agency, accord with Tomasello’s notions of the two steps in evolution, and the two types of “joint” and “collective” intentions.\textsuperscript{465} Tomasello’s idea also shows that human morality “represents the internalized interactive processes – both cognitive and motivational – that structure human’s ultra-cooperative ways of living”.\textsuperscript{466} I consider that the facts concerning human agency, such as the interdependency behind the tendency in human morality to deal with distributive justice, and the group-mindedness behind the tendency to conform to the norms as an end in itself, can also enlighten the nature of moral theories. However, norms and conventions may vary from one culture to another.\textsuperscript{467}

\textsuperscript{462} Tomasello 2014, 191-2.
\textsuperscript{463} Tomasello 2014, 192; Tomasello 2016, 142-7, 150.
\textsuperscript{464} Tomasello 2016, 152.
\textsuperscript{465} Tomasello makes use of Tuomela’s insightful distinction especially in his most recent and philosophically most interesting work \textit{A Natural History of Human Morality} (2016). See, e.g. Tomasello 2016, 27.
\textsuperscript{466} Tomasello 2014, 193.
\textsuperscript{467} Tomasello 2016, 141-2. Tomasello’s work in this book differs from most other evolutionary explanations of morality in that it does not overrule conceptually moral reasons for decisions. And hence, in spite of recognising the differences in social and cultural norms, it does not argue for moral anti-realism. The initial conceptualisation of “moral obligations” and the “responsibility” for partners in a
It should be noted that Tomasello's studies only deal with groups of relevantly similar individuals. This does not, however, rule out the fact that group-mindedness may well be addressed to groups of various kinds of members, including non-humans. In fact, this seems quite empirically evident, because human social groups are always heterogeneous (including infants, aged men and disabled people). The dead members of the group, and often also (at least domestic) animals, some plants and rocks, as well as parts of the landscape can be counted as cultural groups. The ecosystems and landscapes with which the history of a cultural group are tied are often respected as bearers of moral norms, too. Norms, as well as knowledge can be seen to develop in dialogue with the nonhuman members of the ecological system in which it developed. The fact that norms of rationality and moral standards are grounded on processes of cooperation can also hold for heterogenous cooperative groups, including members that cannot take part in self-monitoring or mutual imitation as human partners do.

Adding to Tomasello’s approach, the social psychologist Jonathan Haidt provides an analysis of the role of moral systems in today’s world. Although Haidt criticises developmental psychologists, certain parallels between Haidt’s and Tomasello’s arguments are striking. Haidt uses empirical methods to measure reactions in brain activities in various situations by Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), and analyses discovered emotional responses. He argues that in cross-disciplinary cooperation, social sciences, neuroscience and evolutionary theory can offer “a new synthesis”, a synthetic explanation for human morality. According to Haidt, the mutual, bidirectional influence between evolutionary and cultural factors takes place on two levels. First, moral practices and systems also modify the collabratively successful collective takes place on the level of particular relationships in a natural second-personal morality. This allows for the fact that interpretations in cultural contexts can vary. In my view, these culturally conceptualised norms differ from each other in the contents that concern moral structures, and hence, they may or may not enhance the original, natural ability to conceptualise partners of the collective equally deserving. This, I think, makes a place for moral realism. I am not alone in pointing out that Tomasello’s argument is compatible with moral realism. See, e.g. Jonathan Birch’s review of A Natural History of Human Morality in The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science (https://bjpsbooks.wordpress.com/2017/01/17). Tomasello himself puts it: “Our account is thus grounded in a natural second-personal morality. But in the contemporary world this natural morality is embedded in a cultural morality of social norms, and these have been crafted at different historical periods for different recurrent situations, so they sometimes conflict. In facing a novel situation, then, the individual must create his own moral principles to help adjudicate among these norms and so make decisions that enable him to preserve his moral identity.” Tomasello 2016, 160.

In this sense, the views of Tomasello and others that emphasise the interdependency thesis and collectives clearly differ from more standard evolutionary explanations grounding an explanation of morality on kin selection, for instance. For Tomasello’s view of the interdependence thesis, see Tomasello 2016, chapter 1.


See e.g. Haidt 2009, 278-9. Haidt share, for example, Tomasello’s notion that unique human cognition and moral agency have developed because humans evolved as ultra-social animals, and argues that this explains certain human emotional mechanisms, and emotion-based attitudes.

evolutionary processes: the interconnection between evolutionary (or genetic) and cultural phenomena is mutual in the sense that there are also cultural feedbacks to evolutionary explanations. Second, the complex interaction between emotion-based intuitions and controlled reasoning continue to form and develop moral systems through social models.

Haidt formulates four explanatory principles of moral attitudes. They are: (1) intuitive primacy, but not dictatorship, (2) moral thinking is for social doing, (3) morality binds and builds, and (4) morality is about more than harm and fairness.

For the first, Haidt argues that both intuition and reasoning (as the two kinds of human cognition) are active in morally stimulating situations. But while humans have, according to fMRI evidence, “affectively-valenced intuitive reactions” to morally relevant stimuli, reason is usually used for searching for support for initial judgements that are made in milliseconds. Haidt’s view could be called a social intuitionist model. Although intuition is the primary reaction, socially developed reason is interwoven: it transforms information about the situations and others’ actions into moral decisions. The second principle, moral thinking is for social doing, highlights the strategic role of reason: the aim of reasoning is to do things, not to find the truth. Although no data exists about how people’s reasoning exactly revises their initial judgements, it happens for social, practical reasons.

With the third principle, morality binds and builds, Haidt argues that the key to the “new synthesis” is in the Durkheimian principle that unifies the two directions of agency. Morality “constrains individuals and ties them to each other to create groups that are emergent entities with new properties”. Mutuality and cooperation even with strangers exemplify that human groups with shared moral norms are kinds of super-organisms (comparable to ant colonies). When a super-organism or ultra-social collective engages in cultural practices, such as moral conducts, these practices modify the conditions for genes to be selected and for the group and its members to be developed.

As reciprocal altruism is extended to indirect reciprocity, a community becomes a super-organism that plays a unique role in modifying its environment. The moral community in which virtue is rewarded has attained group solidarity, and this introduces evolutionary advantage. The fourth principle is targeted against the individualistic approaches to morality and highlights that they disregard the notable psychological foundations of moral decisions as they are grounded on ultra-sociality.

Haidt argues that human moral actions as reasons for action are based on five psychological foundations. (i) Harm, care and altruism are based on the fact that

473 Haidt 2007, 1000.
474 Haidt 2007, 998; Haidt 2009, 284.
475 Haidt 2013, 3-60, 111-130, 219-255. A synthetic scientific explanation of morality considers cultural phenomena, such as morality, religion and perhaps philosophy as empirical factors in explanatory principles.
478 Haidt 2007, 1000; Haidt 2013, 314.
people are vulnerable and in need of protection, and (ii) fairness, reciprocity and justice are based on the need for resources and equal treatment. Besides these two, there are important relational reasons. These are (iii) loyalty based on ingroup-outgroup dynamics, (iv) authority, respect and obedience based on intuitions of the authority of the hierarchy that sets limitations on power and bullying, and (v) purity and sanctity based on the emotion of disgust that gives people “feelings that some ways of living and acting are higher, more noble, and less carnal than others.” The last three generate virtues, practices and institutions (such as religions) “to bind people together into hierarchically organized interdependent social groups”, which in turn regulate their members’ daily lives. Together, all psychological foundations are kinds of evolved “learning modules” that along enculturation help humans automatically and quickly recognise virtues and vices.

The increasing volume of research on animal morality resonates with these recent empirical evidences concerning the social and ecological operations that play crucial roles in moral agency. Similarities between human and animal behaviour do not demote human agents, nor do they reduce their agency to determined biological facts, instead, they mark the mechanisms by which earthly modes of agency function and develop. What is important is to note that studies on animal morality disprove the previous presumption that moral agency conceptually requires attributes that are uniquely human. Such attributes may be found beyond our species. The differences between the agency of humans and other animals are not due to any one specific character, but more to the complexity of social relations and the physico-mental operations we perform.

3.2.3 EXTENDED MIND AND INTERACTIVE MENTAL OPERATIONS

In the beginning of the modern era, the emerging modern natural sciences attempted to release the theory of nature from philosophy in order to liberate and enrich human life. During the last centuries, philosophy and the natural sciences have mainly respected each other’s autonomy to an unnecessary and even harmful extent. The problems of this separation are clearly exemplified in the concept of moral agency,

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480 Haidt 2009, 283-4; 2013. Haidt stresses that this statement is descriptive and can be normatively rejected.

481 However, much animal morality research parallels the discussion developed in this study, and however important the support it could offer to my overall argument, for reasons of space I shall not go deeper into that field.


483 Albert Borgmann describes this effect as twofold: “For one thing, philosophers without question accepted the scientific characterization of the fundamental transformation of material culture [...]. For another, philosophers assimilated their enterprise to science but sought to execute it at a higher level.” Borgmann 2003, 26.
especially concerning the functions of the human mind. Moral agency is the fortress of human uniqueness, considered to be the core of philosophy as a humanist science, untouched by natural sciences, and attempts to bridge conceptually between human nature and human moral agency have suffered from provocatively reductionist tendencies.

The questions for this section are: What has influenced philosophical conceptions of being a moral agent? and What kind of new tones are there in the current philosophy of mind to overcome the historical baggage? It seems clear that facing new empirical information also leads philosophers to focus more on the complex meshes of relationships behind reasoning and moral operations. Human morality owes a debt to biological sociability, bodily structures, and ecological facilities, besides the social practices, sensitivity to impartiality (the ability, in principle, to widen the moral instinct to one’s kin to everyone), and the rational ability to understand principles and formulate theories. Therefore, such biological, bodily and ecological factors cannot be ignored when philosophers show concern for the weakness of normative theories to redirect trends of human behaviour in environmental issues. What does it mean to understand mental operations as relational, and what implications do such understandings have in conceptualising moral deliberation?

Cartesian internalism and its philosophical implications in ethics are among the targets of criticism for environmental philosophers, as they are for many post Wittgensteinian philosophers. An interesting perspective, I think, on the Cartesian influence and attempts to overcome it is the collection of Georg Henrik von Wright’s late essays In the Shadow of Descartes: Essays in the Philosophy of Mind (1998). For an analysis, see Alanen 2017, especially 68-84. Von Wright writes, for example, that being bodily is not a contingent issue, but a bodily aspect is “a conceptual or intrinsic feature of actions” (pp. 28-9, Alanen 2017, 68-9). He also thinks that there are points in which reasons and causes converge in the causal chain, and that reasons can sometimes be considered the causes of action (p. 31; Alanen 2017, 72), and: “though with caution – mind can be said to depend, conceptually, on matter, and matter on mind. There is no vicious circle in this mutual dependence” (p. 110, Alanen 2017, 68-84). According to Lilli Alanen, Wright’s aspirations could have benefitted from interdisciplinary discussions with recent findings in an “offshoot” of the philosophy of mind, namely cognitive science. Alanen 2017, 85.

Until recently the other aspect has been defined – and still often is – as “embeddedness”. However, as Mark Rowlands has pointed out, talk about the embedded mind refers to the dependence of the mind from the external context, but the causality of such dependence is not clearly criticised. Instead of that, the arguments for the extended mind thesis make it clear that the thesis is about “the composition or constitution of (some) mental processes”, which are different relations than dependence. Rowlands 2009a, 54. I have used both concepts, because the notion of the extended mind has not yet had a wide influence among environmental philosophers, although Rowlands himself takes part to that discussion, especially in The Environmental Crisis: Understanding the Value of Nature (London, New York: Macmillan Press, 2000). I argue, however, that Rowland’s notion of the extended mind is important, and I agree with his views about the extended mind in my own argument.

485 This is what, for instance, ecofeminists argue. E.g. Plumwood 2002, 78, 142.
their parts, represent an empirically correct view, it must be taken seriously that operations of human agency, those that human agency are composed of, should be located in multilevel ecological relationships. On the one hand these operations are externally relational and refer to both environmental and collective relationships, and on the other they are internally or bodily relational. Relations constitutive to the reasoning and action involve elements from within and from outside: relationality thus denies not only the dichotomy between the material and the mental, or nature and nurture, but in essence between the agent and the external environment.

Conceptually, the notion of embedded or extended agency questions the dichotomy between what constitutes the “active” subject and what constitutes the “passive” object of an act. Rather than talking about objects, it might be more correct to talk about “partners” in order to appreciate their active role in one’s subjectivity. Since a relational conception of self and identity concerns essential interactions and relationships, this conception necessarily respects genuine plurality and real differences. This implies an ethical feature that manifests its special dialogical characteristic, or respect for each other’s voice. The respect of otherness distinguishes the relational notion of self from any metaphysically inclusive holistic view.

Although few philosophers currently regard themselves as Cartesians, the Cartesian problem of the interaction of mind and body has remained among the central questions for the philosophy of mind since Descartes. During recent decades, however, especially powerful criticisms have been put forward in the fields of philosophical inquiry that draw from empirical neurosciences, called enactivism, the extended mind thesis and the philosophy of embodied mind. These fields have provided strong evidence for environmental philosophers who argue against the Cartesian conception of the mind. According to Mark Rowlands, for example, mental operations do not interact with the body or other external realities because the mind is intimately connected with the body and with external reality. Rowlands makes use of the philosophy of embodiment, and especially Mark Johnson’s idea that the complexity of human nature can only be explained by such an account of the embodied mind that consists of multiple nonreductive levels of explanation. I find these lines of thought not only scientifically plausible but also philosophically clear in contrast to the idea of the disembodied mind.

According to Cartesian internalism, the mind is interiority, a ghost in a machine, which is widely criticised as an environmentally destructive conception. Descartes was more interested in the mind than in the physical world: he did not see how

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488 They may, however, philosophically represent either the tradition of phenomenology or analytical philosophy. Enactivism, for instance, draws even from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who defined the relational construction of mental operations. In The Embodied Mind, one of the key works on enactivism, Varela, Thompson and Rosch refer to Merleau-Ponty’s idea that organisms both initiate and are shaped by the environment. According to enactivism, organism and environment must be seen as “bound together in reciprocal specification and selection”. Varela et al. 1991, 174.

489 Johnson 2008, 164. I shall return to Johnson’s view later in this chapter.

thinking could be governed by the mechanical principles that govern the physical world.\textsuperscript{491} Thinking was an activity of a subject directed towards the objects to be thought of. But Descartes was sceptical concerning the possibilities of overcoming the gap between the thinking activity and the external world. Extreme scepticism led him to the idea of the mind as interiority: the only thing one can trust is the existence of the (thinking) activity. Mental operations are thought to be located inside bodily individuals – like psychic monads in the physical world.\textsuperscript{492} Despite the fact that theorising about the mind often denies Cartesian dualism, theories of mind usually stick to internalism. This especially holds for the common understanding of non-cognitive operations of moral agency after Kant: however misguided the human reason might be (the Kantian criticism of pure reason), the freedom of will as the core of moral agency remains untouched by bodily or external interferences in the Kantian concept of the moral agent. A Kantian moral person has a core that remains internal to the mental sphere of an individual. By peeling away features that we cannot trust while hunting for the moral truth, the remaining core of the moral person becomes strong and independent, untouched by misleading influences. Cartesian internalism in a way is crystallised in the Kantian concept of a moral agent.

Internalism consists of ontological, epistemological and axiological components. According to ontological internalism, “any mental phenomenon is spatially located inside the boundaries of the subject, S, that has or undergoes it” (the location claim), and “the possession of any mental phenomenon by a subject S does not depend on any feature that is external to the boundaries of S” (the possession claim).\textsuperscript{493} Epistemological internalism results from a sceptical argument: if the existence of the objects of knowledge (such as my body) is doubtful, but the existence of the thinking thing is definite, then the thinking thing and the object are distinct from each other. Thinking lacks any real connection with the objects it is directed towards. Even though the argument for certainty does not work as an argument for dualism (for there can still be a continuity of things that I am not aware of), it works as an argument for internalism: “each person knows his or her mind first and best”.\textsuperscript{494} Axiological internalism, which is grounded on ontological and epistemological internalism, is an influential presupposition of subsequent metaethical theories (most notably David Hume’s theory). According to axiological internalism, the source of value is either in the inner activity of a monad-like subjective mind, or in the mechanistically governed physical world.\textsuperscript{495} Since the mind is, for ontological reasons, an individual issue, moral concepts must also have their foundation either in individual minds or in the determinist external world, but not in their interaction. The only alternative to the

\textsuperscript{491} Rowlands 2003, 13, 18-19.
\textsuperscript{492} Rowlands 2003, 19, 225. Rowlands takes the metaphor of monads from environmental philosopher J. Barid Callicott. It should be acknowledged, however, that Descartes did not identify “I” or the “mind” with the true man, but only a part of the moral self. As Lilli Alanen argues, “the ‘I,’ whose existence as a purely thinking thing in the Second Meditation before any other knowledge, represents only a part of the ‘I’ or the ‘Self’ of a real human being, whose true nature is discovered only in the Sixth Meditation.” Alanen 2003, 56.
\textsuperscript{493} Rowlands 2003, 13.
\textsuperscript{494} Rowlands 2003, 27.
\textsuperscript{495} Internalism of mental phenomena requires that “[v]alue must be either objectively existing in the world or something subjectively constituted by the activities of the mind.” Rowlands 2003, 30.
subjectivist value theory for an ethical theory that adopts Cartesian internalism is, therefore, the objectivist value theory.

Hume’s decision was to separate factual from value properties, so that factual properties are objectively in the world, external to the subjective mind, while values are internal: Through sensory experiences one can describe the facts of the crime of murder, but the wrongness of murder can only be explained by subjective psychological states and feelings. But it should be noted that the arguments dichotomising subjectivism and objectivism imply internalism as a presupposition. In order to prevent the necessity of dichotomising between subjectivism and objectivism, Rowlands constructs externalist counterparts to internalism. He argues that knowing, as well as valuing, should be located in the relationships by which the subject’s operations are constituted rather than in a private mind. Both objectivism and subjectivism are implausible from the point of view of mental operations: “objectivism makes the gap between value and the valuing too great” but “subjectivism [...] makes the gap between value and valuing too small.” However, the distinction between subjectivism and objectivism can be diminished by a third option.

In contrast to the Cartesian interactionist view, a relational view, defended in this study, proposes that the aspects of mind and body, despite being different, are both constituted by the complex interaction between processes to which various elements take part. Therefore, the question of interaction should be relocated. Criticism against interactionism is supported by recent outcomes in various fields of empirical sciences, such as evolutionary biology and neurosciences. Enactivism is one of the positions that strongly opposes the Cartesian view. According to enactivism, cognition is entirely a bodily issue. All living organisms are also cognitive systems, as they adapt themselves in relation to their environment, and they also have a certain level of sense-making activity. Understanding cognitive systems by their operational closure, as enactivism claims, implies a conceptual shift in the understanding of cognitive operations and their relation to other mechanisms in the world. Most notably, “[cognitive] systems do not operate by representation”. Instead, they “enact a world as a domain of distinctions that is inseparable from the structure embodied by the cognitive system”. Since critical views emphasise the influence of interactivity as such to the very being of both body or mind, they cast suspicion over both ontological reductionisms and standard interactionism. The receptiveness of both genes and the environment and their mutual interaction, for example, offer a perspective on how physical ‘objects’ may play a role in the subjectivity in question.

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496 Rowlands 2003, 30-1. By pointing this out, Rowlands extends the targets of his criticism to cover most forms of materialism besides dualism.
497 Rowlands 2003, 210-1.
498 According, for instance, to the enactive view about visual perception, objects are seen “by the visual guidance of action” rather than by the visual extraction of different features. Empirical animal experiments have shown that in order to function, the visual perception has to interact with the bodily actions that it guides, Varela, Thompson & Rosch 1991, 175.
499 Varela et al. 1991, 139-140. For their criticism of “the Cartesian anxiety”, see pp. 140-3.
Epigenetics also supports the view that physical instances are not deterministic, and that reductionist naturalism or physicalism as a philosophical position does not seem to be scientifically sustained.\textsuperscript{501}

In order to develop the view of relational agency, the insight of recent trends in the cognitive science and the philosophy of mind are enlightening, and offer strong support for the relational understanding of the operations of the mind that are defended in this study.\textsuperscript{502} Widely accepted lines of thought in these fields argue that “inner” activities, such as perception, should be better understood as interactions between the perceiving subject and the perceived object rather than as a one-way causal effect.\textsuperscript{503}

The two especially influential tracks of discussion are currently called the extended mind thesis (EM) and enactivism, or the mind enacted (ME) argument. The argument for the extended mind thesis, sometimes also called environmentalism, was originally formulated by Andy Clark and David Chalmers, and slightly revised by Mark Rowlands.\textsuperscript{504} In short, EM claims that “mental processes have environmental constituents”.\textsuperscript{505} Rowlands defines EM as a thesis with altogether four claims: (1) “The word is an external store of information relevant to processes such as perceiving, remembering, reasoning ... (and possibly) experiencing.” (2) “At least some mental processes are hybrid – they straddle both internal and external operations.” (3) “The external operations take the form of action: manipulation, exploitation and transformation of environmental structures – ones that carry information relevant to the accomplishing of a given task.” (4) “At least some of the internal processes are ones concerned with supplying a subject with the ability to appropriately use relevant structures in its environment.” So, it is an ontic thesis about partial and contingent composition of some mental processes.\textsuperscript{506} The external ingredients in the hybrid mental processes can, in my view, involve external elements in the sense of both the environment and the collective operations the subject takes part in in the social and cultural context. Mental processes are hybrid in a complex sense.

The extended mind thesis (EM) and the loose group of arguments called enactivism (ME) have much in common, though they also have distinctive

\textsuperscript{501} For a short overview on epigenetics, see section 3.2.1. See also Aaron D. Goldberg, C. David Allis and Emily Bernstein, “Epigenetics: A Landscape Takes Shape,” \textit{Cell} 128 (February 2007): 635-8.
\textsuperscript{502} Besides the explicit arguments for the extended mind or enactivism, the issue is currently being handled in various discussions in the philosophy of mind. John Searle, for his part, argues that the usual use of “subjectivity” and “objectivity” fails to take the interactive nature of our experience about bodies and minds seriously. He proposes that both should be approached from a “biological” – and thus organic (relational) – point of view. Searle 2004, 108-10, 113-8. He also makes a distinction between epistemological and ontological subjectivity and objectivity and argues that although a scientific claim might be epistemically objective, it may be ontologically subjective, because the conscious experience is in any case subjective. See Searle 2008, 167. From the point of view of my argument for a relational moral realism, the distinction between what is epistemically and ontologically subjective/objective is of interest: if it is plausible, it would imply that the ontological subjectivity of the truth may be conceptually compatible with its epistemic objectivity. From another angle, John McDowell argues for the role of external culture in a conscious experience. See also Rowlands 2005; Gerber 2002.
\textsuperscript{503} See, for example, Johnson 2008, 160; Noë 2004, 169-172.
\textsuperscript{505} Rowlands 2009a, 60.
\textsuperscript{506} Rowlands 2009a, 53; Rowlands 1999.
elements. ME is a group of arguments originally developed from the early notions of cognitive science about the embodied nature of the mind. According to ME, “the mind is enacted”, or “the brain is tuned for certain potentialities” in relation with the external world. Perception cannot provide the brain with representations from the world, which is the external store of information. Perception that takes place in relation to the sensed object, for instance in visual sensation, works through anticipations of how the experience would change with certain types of action. “As you move with respect to the cube, you learn how its aspect changes as you move – that is, you encounter its visual potential. To encounter its visual potential is thus to encounter its actual shape. [...] To experience the figure as a cube, on the basis of how it looks, is to understand how its look changes as you move.” The general idea is thus abstracted with the help of (1) expectations about the ways in which actions and moves with respect to the object will change the experience of that object, and (2) the ability to act (e.g. by probing and exploring environmental structures) on the world. Sometimes, therefore, ME is linked with the idea of phenomenological presence through the construction of perception by expectations or the imagination. EM and ME both emphasise the role of the externality and relationality of mental processes. Mental processes involve external operations, which take the form of action. As Francis Varela and Evan Thompson put it, “the processes crucial for consciousness cut across the brain–body–world divisions, rather than being brain-bound neural events. Whereas standard approaches to the neural correlates of consciousness have assumed a one-way causal-explanatory relationship between internal neural representational systems and the contents of consciousness, our [enactivist] approach allows for theories and hypotheses about the two-way or reciprocal relationship between embodied conscious states and local neuronal activity.” The relational notion of agency rejects not only dualism but also reductionism of any kind. It cannot accept a monistic view, because in order for the operations required for moral agency to emerge, genuine differences and mutual interactions between different operations are needed.

3.2.4 AGENCY IN PLACE: CARE FOR MORAL CAPACITIES IN THE ENVIRONMENT

The embodiment of moral agency stipulates a reconsideration of the concept of the body. Against the standard modernist view, some environmentalists abandon the
view of the body as just an object. However, as argued earlier, these arguments easily slide into a reductivism of one or kind or another, contrary to the pursued relational view.514 Constructivists stress the phenomenal body, the body as situation tied with the cultural and practised life, while naturalists stress the biological body tied to active evolutionary mechanisms and ecological situations. Unlike both lines of thought, the proposed relational position combines these aspects of embodiment. And more than that, a relational conception of the body exceeds the contours of an individual.

Mark Johnson’s formulation of the embodied mind and cognition is among those that have inspired environmentalists to aspire to relational concepts. Johnson outlines five dimensions of human embodiment, which are all important for creating a whole picture of human nature and agency: (1) the body as biological organism, (2) the ecological body, (3) the phenomenological body, (4) the social body, and (5) the cultural body.515 According to Johnson, the human body cannot be reduced to any one (or more) of them, but consists of relations with the full extent of the various environments: biological, ecological, experienced, social and cultural. Each dimension constitutes its own level of explanation for bodily human agency. But at the same time, all dimensions focus, in one or another way, on the interaction between something called “the individual” and its “environment”. Instead of being passive objects, bodies are cooperative partners of the socio-ecological system through which we perceive and transform ourselves.516 Mind and mental operations are shaped by the embodiment in its complexity.517

According to Johnson, the role of body in agency does not chain such things as freedom, valuation, identity, moral perspective, or even spirituality, which are usually held to be conditional of moral agency, but the conceptions need revision. He also argues that these “most dearly held views about what it means to be human” should be reconsidered, but not discarded.518 His reconsiderations include features that substantially impact the concept of moral agency. First, according to Johnson, “[m]ind and body are not two things” and mental operations emerge from the body, but body is not reductively physical.519 Second, “[h]uman meaning is embodied”, which means that things are meaningful “in virtue of their relations to other actual or possible qualities, feelings, emotions, images, image schemas, and concepts”. Third, “[u]nderstanding and reasoning are embodied”, which means that human beings make sense of the world by their meaning-making capacities based on sensorimotor capacities. But the brains “recruit the patterns of sensorimotor inference, that is, reasoning about abstract entities and events”.520 Fourth, the capacity for reasoning

514 Chapter 2. See also Johnson 2008, 166-7.
515 Explained in Johnson 2008, 164-6, and in a more detailed version in Johnson 2007, chapter 12. Among environmental philosophers especially Christopher Preston, Mark Rowlands and Anna Peterson, develop a relational view that makes use of Johnson’s view.
517 Perception, feeling, emotion, concepts, reasoning, planning, wishing, imagining, dreaming, acting, and valuing are clear examples. According to Johnson, “our embodiment shapes both what and how we experience, think, feel, value, and act. It shapes who we are in such a way that it is implicated in all of our possible self-descriptions.” Johnson 2008, 167.
519 For a denial of reductionism, see Johnson 2007, 277. He describes the relationship between mind and body as co-evolution. See Johnson 2007, 279.
520 Johnson 2007, 279. He notes that his thesis concerning the embodiment of meaning and reason is still a hypothesis that only provides a modest amount of evidence.
and abstract conceptualisation is largely linked with the imaginative structure of conceptual metaphor, which permits inferential structures of bodily experiences to be “a primary way of making sense of abstract entities, relations, and events”. Fifth, the truth arises in human context, relies on embodied meaning and is relative to values and interests; “the trail of the human serpent is everywhere”.\textsuperscript{521} Sixth, human freedom is a modest concept. An agent is free “to contribute to transformations of our situation, and thereby to self-transformations”.\textsuperscript{522} This does not totally rule out freedom: it concerns broadly and non-specifically the habits and behaviour we commit ourselves to.

The above-described multidimensional conception of body accords with the concept of “place” in the environmental \textit{ethics of place}, as Mick Smith and Christopher Preston have argued. For Smith, “[p]lace isn’t reducible to bioregion – or any other kind of region. Places are the particular products of unique combinations of social and environmental relations.”\textsuperscript{523} Using a geographical term, place, Smith and Preston refer to the view that moral life does not consist of cases for an impartial moral unit to apply universal moral rules, but a field in which the agent as a whole is embedded. Place is an ecological concept. Places include different beings, things and relations located in a landscape and having certain distances and mutual ties. Location and relations create meanings for the agent. Place-based ethics thus supposes a clearly relational view of moral agency.

Christopher Preston summarises the same idea by stating that “a physical landscape can sometimes form part of the machinery of the mind”. Therefore, “landscape is not wholly exterior to the mind” but gives “us both a sense of who we are and some shape to how we think”.\textsuperscript{524} Interestingly, empirical evidence shows that a ‘sense of place’ also plays a decisive role in how people engage in environmental activism: place gives reasons for people to resist environmentally destructive projects, such as mining or building a motorway. People do not necessarily resist these projects because of the fear of toxins or other associated vexations, but because they feel that the landscape or particular area under threat, is somehow “constitutive of who they are”.\textsuperscript{525} The identity of an agent is constituted in relationships with the surrounding world. Places, like the niches described above, are explanatory concepts for human agency.

A sense of place is also important from the point of view of ethics: since it binds our identities to certain socially and culturally loaded ecological places, it motivates us to act to protect the capabilities of that place in a wide sense.\textsuperscript{526} According to Smith,
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“[a]n ethics of place’ (i.e., of environments) reconnects moral and physical spaces in such a way as to subvert our present ethical agendas.” 527 It is, I think, worth comparing an ethics of place with feminist ethics. When feminist ethicist and psychologist Carol Gilligan questions the value of separation and detachment in moral deliberation, she asserts the importance of situation and proximity in ethics. The ethics of place highlights the fact that situation and proximity hold not just for the social or cultural conditions (including gender) of the relational agency, but for material and bodily conditions as well. 528 Moral agency is bound to place, since it is born there; it is a skill constituted and developed in interactions. This has ethical implications concerning the environment and the recognition of plurality: we cannot occupy another’s place. 529

A place-based ethics dispels the universal meaning of terms like rights and justice. Since interactions that constitute the agent are not explicitly codified, neither can the norms. 530 With regard to this idea, environmentalists who focus on relational agency are in line with each other. They prefer virtue, care, or a dialogical approach to ethics, as such approaches emphasise characters, tendencies to act, or structures of intentionality rather than separate actions or universal types of deliberation. The development of moral agency rather than the modification of universal static rules, influences most the normative focus. 531 For example, if value construction is bound to the particular ecological, social and cultural “places”, foundations of valid values always remain tied to the cultural focus of attention. Valid value foundations are thus not necessarily fixed, and environmental values highlight some ecological structures and balances over some other in the eco-social system in accordance of the cultural perspective. Ethics should thus be interested in the mechanisms that could develop the conditions of value construction to be ever more inclusive.

If this kind of relational conception of moral agency is sound, the conditions of moral reasoning should be seen as capabilities embedded in factual interactions. This would have an interesting further implication: moral capacities bound to the environmental conditions, in which the skills enabling moral reasoning are constructed, implies that in order to be moral, we are in the first place obligated to take care of the material and structural (ecological) constituents, as well as the social and cultural constituents, of our responsibility. 532 I argue that considering this should be seen as a precondition of any practically valid normative theory.

527 Smith, M. 2001, 152.
528 The moral architecture of the ethics of place can “be expressed in a spatiotemporal metaphorics, a discourse of relativity, proximity, dimensionality, distances, volumes, velocity, and so on”. Smith, M. 2001, 151. But speaking about spatial metaphorics, we need to notice that references to “moral spaces” are not only used in the metaphorical sense in environmental discussion. Compare to Gilligan 1982.
529 “Ethics entails recognizing that we cannot occupy another’s place. It is giving the other the space to be as s/he will without any expectation of recompense. [...] The ethical subject emerges in a relation that inscribes difference as well as similarity at her very heart.” Smith, M. 2001, 185.
530 Smith, M. 2001, 152,166. A similar idea is present in deep ecology, see Næss 1979, 238-9.
531 Sandler 2007, 31; Deane-Drummond 2004, 1. The virtue approach to ethics also allows us to link the enhancement of knowing (or illuminating truth with the help of divine light) with the cultivation of moral skills, which opens up an important discussion on the role of epistemology in environmental ethics. See Preston 2003, 8 and Weston 2009, 9-11.
532 Relational conceptions of an action and the agent do not, however, rule out metaethical variety. While some environmental ethicists seek new foundations for ethics from, for instance, communicative notions of reasoning, others deny the firm and stable foundations of ethics altogether. Even a moral rationalist may find that the idea of relational moral agency both fits and revises his position. Charles
The example of place-based ethics thus attests that the relational conception of agency maintains, and even justifies, a responsibility for protecting the environment. Such normative obligation emerges from the nature of human reason and moral intention. Maintaining human reasoning and moral skills requires maintaining the capacities of ecosystems and all that colonise them to provide these skills. Identity, intentions and knowledge resulting from complex activities, to which physical environments are involved, implies that a general obligation to be moral entails particular obligations for the vitality of the physical environment. We can initially conclude by claiming that a) environments are constitutive for agency, and b) by shaping environments we also shape our structures of thought and ways of constructing moral beliefs. The very conditions of morality are, thus, at least partly dependent on the acts by which we ourselves shape, design and manage our physical environments.

Moral capabilities thus increase or decrease due to our everyday life activities in the world: through shaping our environment we shape our sensitivity for various issues, and the very category of what has moral relevance. The ways an agent pays attention, cooperates and gives space for the observed one to bear meanings modifies how the agent considers her moral aims. By care and sensitivity an agent may let these others rehearse herself to take others ever better into consideration in an encompassing way. A claim approached here resembles the one put forward by environmental virtue ethicists: “If the environment can shape who we are, it can shape our very interests.” I argue that recognition of these relational aspects of agency would be of great value for environmental ethics. The interactive nature of mental operations opens up new insights into the question of what is possible for moral deliberation, and on what condition. The worry has been, however, that emphasis on the embodiment of the moral mind and the embeddedness of the agent would ruin the prerequisites of responsibility, above all autonomy. Were this threat to be realised, the entire meaning of environmental ethics would be annihilated.

Bringing the examples given in section 3.2 together, they claim that (a) interaction between genetic and environmental factors is a crucial factor of evolution, (b) mutual

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533 Preston 2010, 7.
534 This is a central thesis for Preston, too. See e.g. Preston 2010, 11.
535 Borgmann quotes Winston Churchill to illustrate this: “We shape our buildings and then our buildings shape us.” Borgmann 2006, 5.
536 As this seems to form, if not a circular, at least a spiral-like development of moral capacities, a metaethical question about the direction of the development, of course, arises. The question, what are the possibilities for a moral agent to turn a spiral-like degenerative development to be regenerative, is an important one. And this question concerns the concept of freedom that involves the subject. See chapters 4 and 5.
537 Hourdequin & Wong 2005, 27.
cooperativity between organisms is essential for the development of morally capable beings, and (c) physical bodies (brains), moral minds and cultural habits are interrelated through their coevolution. These claims concern the psychological foundations of moral agency. The given examples also share some positions concerning the idea of moral self. First, the question “who we are?” can only be answered by focusing on our actions in the relationships we have. In this sense, the future is not determined, although it is not up to free choice, either. Life and its development are caused by complex influences that take place in a network of relations in which all relevant partners are influential. Identifying oneself as relational, therefore, brings with it a call for commitment to others. These others are various. Providing knowledge implies providing cognitive commitment and careful listening to others, while making changes, say, in one’s own behaviour implies making “collective” cultural changes in the web of relations one lives in. Second, the plurality of relational selves makes it impossible to talk about universal, stable agents. Related parties are cooperatively creative, not individual equals having democratic discourse. Identifying oneself as relational should bring about the motivation to appreciate and care for the others constitutive of “what I am”. Third, since construction of the very being in ecological networks is an empirical fact, it is impossible to separate what profits one partner of the network from what profits others. In this sense, identifying oneself as relational implies considering the factual conditions of life for others as moral duties to oneself.

### 3.3 KNOWING RELATIONALLY

#### 3.3.1 KNOWING IN DIALOGUE

The theory of social representation is an interesting example of dialogical understanding of cognitive processes and epistemic trust. As a constructivist theory of knowledge, it states that social representations are constantly converted through re-interpretations and re-presentations in the cognitive social activity: cognitive contents emerge and change in dialogical communication. However, studies applying social representation theory to the notion of dialogical rationality usually avoid confusion between social ways of knowing and the issue of truth. The method of exploiting human sociability, or ultra-social animality, in order to get through to some “truth” or “correct action” is an ethically laden mode of interaction, namely a dialogical sense. Knowing requires communication based on epistemic trust, and such communication has a contractual, moral structure.

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538 Theory is originally introduced by a social psychologist Serge Moscovici and inspired by Émile Durkheim’s notion of collective representations. See Serge Moscovici, *La psychanalyse, son image et son public.* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961). The theory has been later developed, for example, by Ivana Marková.

539 A socially constructed common sense is “a dialogical sense [...] a vital feature of social interaction and communication underlain by the ethics of the Self-Other”. Marková 2016, 4-5.

540 Marková & Linell 2014a, 219, 231.
Theories about knowing as a mental operation of an individual usually attribute individual thinking with capacities for ‘objectivity’ or ‘rationality’ in an individual. Contrary to this, social representation theory argues that the capacity of an individual to make moral judgements is based on their dialogical capacity of reasoning. Ethics in particular requires dialogical rationality.\textsuperscript{541} Pursuing objectivity requires commitment to particular dialogical processes. Inquiries into child development in the field of sociology show that openness to relational communication and the capacity for dialogical reasoning precede the sense of autonomy or other senses relevant for moral deliberation and action.\textsuperscript{542} Conversely, actions of trust mark the agent’s relationally dependent autonomy. Trust can thus be described as a combination of dependency and autonomy.\textsuperscript{543} Epistemic trust can be divided into two types: trust in the agents, who are regarded as autonomous in the sense that they can cheat, and confidence in other beings and things in the world. In both types, trust implies agentive movements from the one who trusts and seeks to “know”. By the acts of epistemic trust, the agents recognise each other as autonomous partners in a nexus in which knowledge is constructed.\textsuperscript{544} From the point of view of ecologically relational moral agency, it is interesting that, according to social representation theory, the abilities of a human to commit to dialogical relationships are fundamentally body-related experiences.\textsuperscript{545} Body-related experiences are, thus, behind the openness and commitment to others, which grows into morally laden relationality, and which makes humans capable of learning from, negotiating with, and accepting or rejecting the epistemic trust of others.\textsuperscript{546} These relational features also play a central role in the emergence of autonomy.

Another recent discussion to which social representation theory is connected is the one concerning the links between evolutionary explanations of natural cooperativity and collective rationality, both being grounds for moral conceptualisation. Michael Tomasello even argues that interdependence between individuals helps to explain the evolutionary origins of human moral psychology. Unlike most others, he thinks that the evolutionary meaning of interactivity for human moral agency is not one of motivation, but it is constitutive for the cognitive structure in which morality emerges. In this sense, human interdependence does not only explain why basically selfish people are motivated to act morally, but also

\textsuperscript{541} Granted that each individual is “capable of ethical and moral judgement, [...] this capacity does not arise in the mind of a sole individual due to his/her innate conative rationality, but [...] the nature of this capacity is dialogical.”; “[E]therics [...] is not based on individual rationality, but on dialogical rationality.”; “The concepts of individual rationality and of dialogical rationality have fundamental implications for questions about the nature of language, thinking and knowing, about the individual and social action, and about ethics and morality.” Marková 2016, 5.
\textsuperscript{542} Marková 2016, 128-9; Tomasello 2014.
\textsuperscript{543} Cornejo 2014, 69.
\textsuperscript{544} Cornejo 2014, 240: “In trust, the other cannot be coerced to do what we have agreed; rather, she must honor my trust voluntarily. In confidence, the lack of the assumption of autonomy of the other’s behavior highlights the fact that trust implies personhood. Genuine trust can exist only among persons [...]. It is important to note that trust—in both modes—implies agentive movements in the world. In confidence and in trust, I have expectations with respect to the future behavior of the world.”
\textsuperscript{545} Marková 2016, 129-30, see also 143-52; Cornejo 2014; Marková & Linell 2014b; Tomasello 2014, 189-90. And as Cornejo points out, the basic modes of epistemic trust arise in the confidence experienced in relation to the physical environment and our ecological companies. “[D]iverse types of trust exist in any human encounter with the non-human (physical or animal) world.” Cornejo 2014, 238.
\textsuperscript{546} Marková 2016, 152.
describes the cognitive structure in which the ideas of fairness, equity and respect emerge. Interactivity explains the origins of cooperative and cultural rationality, which are grounds for conceptualising moral obligations.\textsuperscript{547} Some scholars argue that the “we-relationship” depicts the most fundamental experience in the lifeworld and is a prerequisite of epistemic trust. It is a dialogical experience in which we verify “the primacy of trust over mistrust or, in effect, the disposition to believe over the disposition to suspect”.\textsuperscript{548} The we-relationship is a vivid, spatially and temporally immediate face-to-face situation, “in which I become aware of a fellow human being as a person”. An agent is oriented towards the other in a way that he understands the expressions of the other directly. He is with her and follows her actions without constructing descriptions of her beforehand. When such an orientation is reciprocal in the interaction, the we-relationship becomes our primordial cognitive meaning sphere, the “common stream of consciousness”.\textsuperscript{549} Social or collective notions of cognition are of great interest for environmental ethics, as environmental problems typically arise from the gap between the individual level of reasoning and collective level habits cumulating from individual pieces of action that are separately seen as morally neutral.\textsuperscript{550}

\underline{3.3.2 KNOWING IN PLACE: ENVIRONMENTALIST EPISTEMOLOGY}

Christopher Preston and Mark Rowlands are among the philosophers actively discussing the environmentalist approach to epistemology.\textsuperscript{551} They develop a notion of knowledge that takes into account the relational nature of the epistemic agent described in recent philosophy of mind and cognitive science, most clearly in enactivism,\textsuperscript{552} as well as in evolutionary and ecological psychology.\textsuperscript{553} Moral epistemology that sticks to the disembodied view of the epistemic and moral subject is considered problematic for successful environmental ethics. Specific criticism is targeted against implied Cartesian internalism, in which will, intention and other “internal” operations are supposed to be isolated from the external aspects, such as...
physical impacts, facts, social influence and cultural practices. With this split in moral agency, moral subjectivism necessarily implies antirealism. According to Preston and Rowlands, such presuppositions have alienated the knowing subject from the known object by separating internal knowledge as exact and certain, and knowledge about the outside world as doubtful and isolated from the “thinking thing”. In that view, a true belief must apply for justification in terms of internal certainty to qualify for knowledge. But moral epistemology that tries to formulate clear and certain “justificatory conditions of ‘X knows that p’”, adopts “the computational metaphor of mind”.

In contrast to this, environmentalist epistemology highlights the complex process of interaction that takes place in the epistemic event at both mental and material levels. External relationships, such as place, ecological position and the structure of society, are not irrelevant to how and why ‘X knows that p’; they have an influence even in the epistemic content. Preston develops place-based epistemology, which aims at grounding knowledge to the Earth, while Rowlands just talks about environmentalist epistemology. Both argue for situated knowing: knowing that is possible for a human agent always remains physically and ecologically contextual. The capacity of knowing is not absolute or detached, and neither is the knowledge it can reach. The achievement of whatever cognitive content there may be is bound to the reality in which “place and mind are in a dialectical relationship, continually and dynamically shaping each other”. According to Preston and Rowlands, particular bodily existence, physical and geographical conditions, ecological structures and even the experience of landscapes, take part in the constitution of cognitive operations and influence their results. Despite the naturalistic emphasis, environmentalist epistemology does not conflict with the constructivist idea of knowledge formation. On the contrary, it can be seen as an approach that is parallel with feminist epistemology.

According to Rowlands, human cognitive architecture is, at least partly, external to the cognising body. The actual information processing goes on in the relationships between an agent and the external world: “acting upon external structures is a form of information processing”. Environmentalist epistemology calls into question the entire idea that cognitive operations are ‘in here’, while the world exists ‘out there’. As processes, cognitive operations “are themselves, at least in part, processes of the world”. They include worldly constituents, and cannot “be identified independently

554 For more, see section 3.2.3. Rowlands 2003, 183-201.
555 Johnson 2008, 159.
557 Preston 2003, 136.
558 Preston 2003, 103-8. Cf. with e.g. Code’s starting point of “ecological thinking – which takes its point of departure from specifically located, multifaceted analyses of knowledge production and circulation in diverse demographic and geographic locations— [and] can generate more responsible knowings than the reductivism of the positivist post-Enlightenment legacy allows”. Code 2005, 87. Preston seems to appreciate especially Sandra Harding’s, Donna Haraway’s and Lorraine Code’s epistemological works. Therefore, I think, there is enough proof to treat also the procedural accounts of objectivity and truth in these two types of views as complementary rather than as contrasting.
559 Rowlands 2005, 19.
of the world”. Rowlands’s view echoes Wittgenstein’s solution to the sceptical paradox: meaning and understanding are things that we achieve in the world in practice, not inside our head, which makes Wittgenstein’s heritage profoundly externalist. However, while defenders of the externalist argument mainly talk about content externalism, meaning that externalism applies to propositional states because of their semantic content, Rowlands defends vehicle externalism, which is about cognitive processes. He is unsatisfied with content externalism, because “it doesn’t go far enough”, since it leaves cognitive processes, such as perceiving, remembering, thinking and reasoning to be explained in terms of internal structures. Therefore, Rowlands calls his position, derived from vehicle externalism, environmentalist epistemology.

Rowlands extends externalism about the vehicles of cognitive processes to cover also the vehicles of the epistemic content. The environment contains structures that carry information relevant to accomplishing cognitive tasks, and that information can be made available only by acting upon these structures, and effecting transformations in it. Information processing does not only happen in the head or inside the skin, but partly in the world. Rowlands extends the model to hold also for complex cognitive processes, such as remembering and reasoning. Thus, if epistemic environmentalism is accepted, it means that cognitive operations, epistemic content, as well as the measures of knowledge are in conjunction with what we “do in (and to) the world”. Cognition is essentially an environmentally relational process. Relationships with the nonhuman and material partners of the ecological place in which cognition takes place are not neutral. This implies that one reason for acting morally towards the environment is certainly an epistemological one.

Christopher Preston’s place-based epistemology shares the external understanding of the cognitive processes and the important connection between ethics and epistemology. Preston argues for the ecologically relational nature of the epistemic agency: “The material structures of the world, then, are agents in the authorship of knowledge.” He also focuses on the implications of environmentalist epistemology to ethics, and argues that “ecological and geographical diversity should

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560 Rowlands 2005, 25-6. The cognitive process is “(i) one that aids in the accomplishing of a cognitive task, and (ii) that does so by manipulation or transformation of information bearing structures.” Rowlands 2005, 16.

561 Rowlands 2003, 88, 94-6. For Rowlands’s discussion about Hilary Putnam’s interpretation of the externalist argument, see pages 103, 121-2.

562 For example, Hilary Putnam, Tyler Burge, David Kaplan, Donald Davidson and John McDowell.

563 Rowlands 2003, 155-182.

564 Rowlands 2003, 143-4; 2005, 6-7.

565 Rowlands 2006, 49.

566 Rowlands 2005, 18.


568 Rowlands 2005, 24-6. Rowland’s idea of body language implies a strong type of vehicle externalism according to which we “cannot separate, not even logically, representation from action” in relation to the world. In order to avoid conceptual ambiguities he uses the term deed, or preintentional act, instead of action in his argument on representation in action. Rowlands 2006, 83, 91, 93, 102-111.

569 Our actions in relation to the environment influence the quality of our cognitive processes: the ability of the environment to “help” our cognitive process is tied with the continuity of the ecological structures, and our relation to them.

570 See Preston 2009, 180, 182, 185-6.
be preserved because ‘landscape diversity is a valuable source of the diversity [of option] sought by epistemologists’”.

Preston poses a historical criticism of Francis Bacon’s influence in epistemology, the mistake being, according to Prseton, that “the dialogue between mind and world” was transformed “into an arrogant monologue, or even inquisition”.

Despite the similarities with Rowlands, place-based epistemology takes more insights from constructivist environmental philosophy (especially ecofeminism) than from naturalist views. The technical term “place” refers not only to physical realities and landscapes but also to cultural values, spiritual meanings, the formation of identity and personal narratives included in a certain space. The influence between the agents and the place is twofold. Preston widens the feminist standpoint theory to include the physical and material aspects of epistemic processes.

Preston claims that the development of naturalising knowledge started historically already with Kant and was significantly continued by Quine. Quine’s response to scepticism, unlike Kant’s response, connects knowledge production with the biological cognitive systems of the human agent, especially the brain. This, Preston argues, was historically a turning point for epistemology, which was quickly thereafter developed to take into account not just the operations of the brain but of the whole body (of which the brain is part) in the epistemic process. This, again, has been developed into an understanding that not just the operations of the individual body but the wider physical environment in which the bodily processes take place, should be taken into consideration. However, many followers of Quine can be criticised for sticking to scientifically naïve naturalist epistemology and seeing humans as little more than an information-processing brain. Preston argues that Quine’s view should be revised to understand the wide meaning of interactions: humans are the unique corporeal, embodied actors they happen to be because of complex epistemic interactions that are largely determined by the operations of the entire body, understood in a wide, environmental sense.

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573 Preston 2003, 74-5.

574 “[T]he contours of a physical environment are not just a blank canvas upon which a human drama is scripted. They co-constitute the drama, taking an active role in determining some aspects of how that drama gets written. Place is not simply a backdrop for thought. It exudes a power that can bring shape to portions of our conceptual life.” Preston 2010, 6.

575 Here his view can be compared with that of feminist epistemologist Lorraine Code and many ecofeminists, such as Anna Peterson, Bonnie Mann and Evelyn Fox Keller. They criticize extreme constructivism, and defend materially sensitive, situated knowledge. See Peterson 2001, Mann 2005, Keller 1992. Along with them, Preston seeks “a persuasive account of the influence of physical environment on thought and belief, without slipping into a pernicious environmental determinism”. Preston 2009, 177-8.

576 According to Kant and Quine, what can be known is tied to the agent of knowledge. The agent that “knows” is not just a passive recorder, it is instead an active participant in the proceeding knowledge.

577 He agrees here, for example, with Lorraine Code and Katherine Hayle, who argue that the operations of the entire body determine the nature of our epistemic interactions with the world. See Kathrine Hayles, “Searching for Common Ground,” G. Lease and M. Soulé (eds.), Reinventing Nature (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1995: 47-64), 40; Lorraine Code, “What is Natural about Epistemology
According to Preston, recent studies of ‘the embodied mind’\(^{579}\) and of ‘the extended mind’\(^{580}\) offer the proof to argue that human rationality is integrally connected to the animal nature of human agents. These studies prove that social structures, symbols of interaction (language), and cultural meanings, besides brain activity, have their origins in the animal nature. Rationality is based on the animal nature of humans, in which various social and ecological aspects are interactively structured.\(^{581}\) Historically speaking, what has been needed in order to reconnect the alienated mind to the world is, firstly, “a therapeutic reconnection to the brain”, secondly, “to the body”, and thirdly and finally, “to the physical spaces in which those bodies roam”. In order to be richly situated, the notion of knowledge requires all these aspects.\(^{582}\)

For Preston, implications of richly situated knowledge and ecological agency are deeply ethical: Material settings and physical structures that we modify by economy, art and design, for instance, take part in moral actions as “actors” of the epistemic process. Therefore, physical structures can also shape our lives and how we think about our lives in an important way. “The material structures of the world [... | 1-22, 8. Both are referred to in Preston 2003, 33.]

\(^{579}\) See Johnson 1987; Lakoff & Johnson 1999; Rowlands 1999.


\(^{581}\) Preston claims that the life we share with animals “[i]s the much deeper tie-in than sensori-motor life”, it is “an ineradicable component of our ability to understand our world. The rational is not a whole different category from the sensori-motor, rather it relies on it for its very functioning.” Preston 2002, 434. See also section 3.2.

\(^{582}\) Preston 2003, 43.

\(^{583}\) Preston 2009, 180, 185. According to Preston, “questions about how technology and the built environment frame our understandings of the world are indeed epistemological, perhaps in a way that has far more relevance than questions raised by the ‘justified true belief’ model of epistemology”. Probing the reciprocal relationship between what we believe and what we surround ourselves with seems like important work. Uncovering how features of our material environment lead us to hold certain beliefs, values, and conceptions of the world seems like a central epistemological task as well as a central environmental one.” (p. 185).

\(^{584}\) As the mind is embodied, the boundary between rational and just sensory beings is blurred.

\(^{585}\) Preston 2003, 112; Preston 2002, 436.

\(^{586}\) Preston 2003, 114.
3.3.3 THE NATURE OF RELATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Environmental or place-based epistemology does not necessarily entail subjectivism in the sense that knowledge is subjective to those sharing a similar context. Instead, I would define such epistemology as relational. Preston and Rowlands both defend a “human version of objectivity” included in epistemic diversity, which they take to be a starting point. In spite of being partial, contextual and physically tied, the epistemic processes through the diversity of place-bound perspectives function as procedures for approaching objectivity.\textsuperscript{587}

Environmental epistemologies are, I would say, naturalist counterparts for procedural constructivist epistemologies, such as the feminist standpoint theories of knowledge.\textsuperscript{588} They highlight the limited capacity of any Earthly epistemic system, and the inescapable partiality of any perspective to knowledge. But while constructivist epistemologies focus on the influence of socially constructed concepts on mental categories and language, their environmental counterparts highlight the influence of material structures (whether they are “natural” or constructed by humans) and ecological conditions on the mental structures.

The concept of knowledge differs from both the standard correspondence and coherence theories. In environmental epistemologies knowledge does not represent reality but it influences through the dialogue which affects the structures of mind as well as reality beyond.\textsuperscript{589} The idea of a picture reflected in mind is an implausible idea, since emerging of any such picture takes place through adapting the mind to the world. The physical structure of the mind, the individual brain, for example, is influenced by what it “knows”, and so is the outer world “known by the mind”. Instead of a reflected picture of reality, knowledge in this theory could well be defined as a piece of art. The material out of which a piece of art is made cannot be separated from the performed idea: the known becomes present in a material form (or performs itself) for the mind, and influences the other mental inhabitants of the subject, such as imagination and memory. Effected changes in the mental structures again influence how the “object” of knowledge will perform itself.

The crucial factor for objectivity then is whether the dialogue functions in a way that provides reliable knowledge. Objectivity is embedded in relationships, and hence, epistemic reliability relies on ways of practising relationality.

The active role of the material world is also present in ecofeminist notions of epistemology. According to Donna Haraway, for example, in the epistemic process the material partner is “an actor and an agent, not a screen or a ground or a resource”. Therefore, the purpose of knowing the world sets us a normative claim: the world should not be pictured “as slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and authorship of ‘objective’ knowledge”.\textsuperscript{590} Knowledge construction takes place in ecological and socio-cultural relationships. Feminist epistemologies aim to reconsider rather than dismiss the concepts of rationality and objectivity. They argue

\textsuperscript{587} Preston 2003, 122-6.
\textsuperscript{588} For more, see chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{589} Preston 2003, 127-9, 134-6.
\textsuperscript{590} Haraway 1988, 592.
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against the dichotomising sociology of knowing and objectivity. Ecofeminists in particular argue that the earthly embedded epistemic process is intimately bound to the physical objects of knowledge, which themselves are active in the process.

According to feminist standpoint theories, objectivity increases with the help of socially (and ecologically) dynamic procedures of knowledge formation. Susan Harding’s idea of strong objectivity, for instance, argues for approaching objectivity by giving a privileged role to marginalised standpoints. Helen Longino uses collective objectivity to depict the procedure to approach objectivity by relational reconsideration of the epistemic agent. According to Longino, individuals are epistemic fictions rather than agents. Knowledge is produced in an interactive collective, and the structure of that collective is crucial for objectivity. Dialogue, common standards of criticism and equal distribution of intellectual authority are examples of the means for objectivity. Standards of objectivity should involve the whole process of understanding – not just standards of epistemic contents, but of relationships, too. The impact of the dynamic nature of human relationality to knowledge is especially clear in Evelyn Fox Keller’s notion of dynamic objectivity. There are psychological backgrounds for our conceptual structure, and epistemic agency results from and is transformed by various relationships of the subject’s life. The search for dynamic objectivity thus means seeking for a maximally authentic understanding of the world in conditions of uncertainty. This can be done by dynamic integrity and proper relationships with the environments, which thus should be the targets of evaluation in epistemic reliability.

Both Longino and Keller seem to be well aware that the notion of relational knowledge pools the two approaches: naturalising epistemology and feminist epistemology. Longino points out that there are remarkably parallel ideas between feminist epistemology and the recent philosophy of biology about epistemic agency. Lorraine Code also criticises mainstream feminist epistemology for not taking into account the ecological conditions of knowledge. She argues for an ecological notion

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591 Longino 2002a, 1. This is also the conviction that can be constructed on the basis of dialogical social psychology. Carlos Cornejo, for example, describes how the internal dialogue as a multiplicity of voices and the infinite possibilities of interpretations are reflectively settled. Cornejo 2014, 252-3.

592 See Harding 2004a.


595 As a physicist feminist thinker, Keller draws here on Nancy Chodorow’s theory of psychological object relations. See Holst 2005, 190. According to Keller, the positivist ideal of scientific objectivity is based on “male subjectivity”, and as such, it is a weak account of objectivity.


597 She also develops her view in dialogue with the philosophy of science, cognitive scientists and evolutionary theorists. An interesting discussion between Longino and Philip Kitcher in Philosophy of Science 69 (2002) exemplifies the endeavour. See Longino 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Kitcher 2002a, 2002b. According to Longino, despite the points of divergence, they “both support some kind of democratic inclusiveness in science, [they] accept some forms of theoretical pluralism, [they] agree on the context-dependence of scientific significance, [they] agree that a complete account of scientific rules or norms must include rules applicable to social interaction, [they] even agree that scientific judgement should be held to evidential standards.” Longino 2002b, 573.

598 See Longino 2002b, 2002c, and Code 2006a. Both criticise the epistemic and political imaginary that produces “this idealized individual knower, who is of a piece with the autonomous moral agent and political actor in the dramas of modernity”. Code 2008, 193; Longino 2002a, 147.
of cognitive activity, by which the agent is engaged with the facts of the world: the relationality of cognitive activity combines material and mental aspects. According to Code, thinking is an epistemic practice that not only mirrors the world we are already engaged with, but generates new engagements and, thus, new “facts”. Responsibility should thus be directed to this practice.

Thinking as an ecologically structured process emphasises that facts are engaged with the agency in its entirety rather than with limited mental structures. Therefore, Code describes knowledge formulation as a collaboration rather than as a discourse or interaction. Collaboration bears the idea of community that grows by the process of being “more than a sum of its discrete parts”. According to Code, using ecological terms rather than relational ones offers “a way of both naturalizing and socializing epistemology”. My choice to use the concept of “ecologically relational agency” in this study partly reflects a similar aspiration than Code has when she writes about her concept of “ecological thinking”. According to her, “it offers a model of knowing that is at once situated in and in relation to multiple aspects of the human and other-than-human world, interwoven with moral-social-political epistemological issues, and committed to exposing the effects of power-knowledge intersections, be they benign, malign, or ‘in-between/in-among.’” In this sense, ecology does not only refer to ecological science, nor to socioecology. The focus is on how the mind aiming at knowledge is structured. The ecological notion of knowledge involves the fact that objectivity can be approached through commitment rather than distancing oneself from objects. Objectivity increases by procedures of “ongoing self-reflexive and negotiative commitment” to various relationships and collaborative efforts to produce the best possible standards for epistemic practices.

Relational agency calls for scepticism about (factual/moral) knowledge, but not necessarily about justification. I argue that relational agency allows us to think that there are contextually justified (epistemic) beliefs on the basis of (morally) justified procedures and standards regulating (epistemic) relationships. Instead of insisting that objectivism should be the central pillar of the conceptual apparatus of an autonomous man of reason, modest relational or ecological approaches to knowledge accept uncertainty. However, in contrast to certainty, uncertainty serves epistemic and moral development: it forces one to better engage the world with the structures constitutive to epistemic agency. Contextually justified beliefs may not necessarily be true, but they are less false than some others, since they transform

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602 Code 2008, 188.
604 For two types of moral scepticism, see Sinnott-Armstrong 1996, 6.
605 Code 2006b, 224.
606 “Objectivity is not about disengagement, but about mutual and usually unequal structuring, about taking risks in a world where ‘we’ are permanently mortal, that is, not in ‘final’ control. We have, finally, no clear and distinct ideas.” Haraway 1988, 595-6.
relational moral agency in a way that improves the skills of agency and draws, thus, future beliefs closer to the truth.\textsuperscript{608} The idea of epistemic responsibility is important for relational epistemology.

Ecologically relational epistemology also has implications for the concept of moral knowledge.\textsuperscript{609} Moral beliefs may be seen to be collaboratively constructed in discourse with more than the human members of the community we live in. In order to approach moral objectivity, then, we need to “pay attention to the epistemic import of the physical environments we create and live in” and of the nonhuman beings.\textsuperscript{610} This implies that plurality must be respected: diversity offers more potential for interaction than a monoculture, and commitment to multiple collaborative relationships offers the potential for improving one’s integrity of understanding.\textsuperscript{611} Whatever the procedure for the objectivity of moral judgements is thought to be (discourse, reflective equilibrium, feminist standpoint theory or some other), physical and material aspects of the epistemic situation (e.g. ecology, geography, climate, and topology) must be involved in the successful procedure.

Embedding procedures for objectivity in a plurality of partial positions does not need to amount to relativism nor to “slipping into a pernicious environmental determinism”.\textsuperscript{612} We add something to the world that determines its value for us.\textsuperscript{613} Manipulation of the environments/places/niches contributes to the epistemic architecture in which both moral and epistemic beliefs are constructed. Places (all kinds of places: urban, wild, social, religious and climatic) are “of cognitive or epistemic value for us”,\textsuperscript{614} and they govern the natural definitions of good and other moral terms. However, the cognitive meaning of place is not predetermined but produced in dynamic interaction between subjects and their places/niches. Knowledge is interwoven in active relationships without precise justification outside the practices of that relationship.\textsuperscript{615}

\textsuperscript{608} Code has a somewhat similar idea. See, e.g. Code 2006b, 224.
\textsuperscript{609} Preston 2003, 110-5; Preston 2009, 179-81; Rowlands 2006, 91, 223-4.
\textsuperscript{610} Preston 2009, 175.
\textsuperscript{611} A parallelism may be elucidative: biodiversity sustains evolutionary improvement. An epistemic process based on a diversity of relationships sustains the improvement and ecological coherence of knowledge production and thus makes thus the product more encompassing.
\textsuperscript{612} Preston 2009, 177.
\textsuperscript{613} Ways to explain novelty in knowledge production are various. One is to apply the idea of creative imagination, which is the linchpin of Mark Johnson’s view of the embodied mind. See Johnson 1993, 242; Preston 2003, 127.
\textsuperscript{614} Preston 2003, 117; Preston 2009, 179.
\textsuperscript{615} According to Rowlands, acts of consciousness are combinations of revealing-revealed. A conscious experience “belongs to the revealing objects: it consists in, and constitutes, the revealing of objects to be a certain way. As such, it is not an object revealed, and lies, at least apparently, outside the causal order. Nevertheless, what is revealed – e.g. bodily-damage-as-painful – is an object of consciousness, and, as such, can lie inside the causal order. It can, therefore, play a role in the causal production and/or explanation of behaviour.” Rowlands 2001, 234-35; 2005, 17.
3.3.4 KNOWING BY PRACTISING

A relational approach to agency means that knowing is a collective, ecological, and place-based process. An additional aspect to be noticed here is the role of actions – intentional or not – for the epistemic outcomes. Involving the environmental embeddedness of the agent to epistemology usually calls for either scientifically or culturally naturalised knowledge production. However, currently the most notable explanations of cognitive operations combine elements from both scientific (evolutive) and cultural (constructivist) naturalisation.

Scientific naturalisation in epistemology takes two modes: the cognitivist approach depicts brains as a complicated computer providing knowledge, while the enactivist approach focuses on the influence of dynamic mutual interactivity between the elements of embodied cognition. With the help of key Darwinian innovations on the one hand and constructivism on the other, enactivism argues that cognition includes active elements beyond the organism seen as the knowing agent: cognition is embedded in its different environments. According to my understanding, enactivism as a cluster of recent theories related with each other seems to resonate with the aspirations that have been unarticulated in constructivist and naturalist strategies for environmental ethics. Therefore, I argue, closer examination of these related theories will be of great value for further environmental ethics.

Early approaches to cultural naturalising in epistemology, such as Kuhn’s and Feyerabend’s, focus on the theoretical, historical, sociological and methodological frameworks of knowledge. According to Preston, however, three strains of cultural naturalisation can be discerned: historical, sociological and material. The Material strain refers to constructionist views that highlight the constructive contribution of material spaces for knowledge, such as the physical arrangements of a lab. Laboratory itself can be seen to become an agent of scientific development, and thus, the reconfiguration that produces scientific theories should be seen as a product of both human and material agency. In the terms of cognitive scientist Andrew Pickering, there is a “dance of agency” between human and material actors in the lab. The lab-techniques create an order of nature that mixes social and natural. The idea accords, for example, with what Donna Haraway calls the “material-semiotic” order of nature.

The idea of mixed, “environmentalist”, or “ecological” epistemology is initially already present in the neo-Kantian insight, according to which knowledge synthesises something brought by the scientist with something brought by the world. It can also be seen in the Quinean insight that knowledge is never totally pure but nor is it totally

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620 Preston 2003, 35-41.
alienated from the world. But the number of factors acknowledged as constitutive to the cognition has expanded since the early days of neo-Kantianism and Quine.\textsuperscript{622} Even the environmental fact that the conditions on Earth change due to the influence of human intentional activity highlights the indirect influences of actions through the environment to the constitution of agency and cognitive environments. As geological and climatic conditions and ecosystem services, for instance, are not culture-independent, an understanding of the mutual interactivity between cultural constructivity and the embodiedness of mind will become important. The consequences of freely chosen activities and cultural identities have reached a new level that cannot be ignored in epistemology or moral theory. Cultural practices and actions have turned to strong determinants and limits the freedom of our future actions.

The relational notions of cognition put forward by enactivism and the extended mind thesis, for instance, challenge the modernist approaches that are still prevalent in moral philosophy. For example, the Kantian conclusion derived from transcendental idealism is that moral principles should be distanced from empirical knowledge because of the incapability of empirical knowledge to carry truth concerning moral facts. In contrast to that, environmental epistemologies call for engagement in risky interactions as the only way beyond contingences. Their strategy is inclusion, not exclusion.\textsuperscript{623} Rationality of action requires that the conception of knowledge be evaluated from the point of view of its ability to listen to the different voices of the world. Therefore, epistemology should be modest, or even humble, in order to represent reality.

I argue that a relational understanding of knowledge construction – as it involves in knowing not only social structures but also ecological constructions – will also challenge the mainstream concept of rationality. The reason is that relational knowledge construction points to a complex mutual causality between actions on the one hand and epistemic abilities, knowledge and moral beliefs on the other. According to the mainstream modern conception of moral rationality, knowledge belongs to premises for moral action, but not vice versa. This is one of the conceptual features of modernity questioned by the relational notion of agency. The relational view of cognitive operations calls for taking the interdependency between praxis (material as well as social) and knowledge into account in considering rationality.\textsuperscript{624} The role of knowledge in practical rationality is not an instrumental one. This becomes crucial for agents that are constitutively related to their socio-ecological niches. Agents should see themselves as responsible for the facts of those niches as conditions for their epistemic abilities, rationality and for their own value (both directly and indirectly through manipulation of their biological or environmental conditions).

\textsuperscript{622} Preston 2003, 42.
\textsuperscript{623} This sets requirements for the attitude: empathy for those who cannot express their viewpoint and suspiciousness about those who have the power to offer “firmly founded knowledge”. This accords with feminist epistemology. See Harding 1991 and Harding (ed.) 2004.
\textsuperscript{624} The aspiration to make explicit the point that knowing and valuing are interwoven notably unites different philosophers, here, for example, environmental feminists and pragmatists. Compare e.g. Harding 1991, 57-60 and 2004, 136; Haraway 1988; Putnam 2004, 135-7.
If the relational notion of agency holds plausible, attempts to find procedures for (epistemic or moral) knowledge must take the mutual influence between praxis and belief into consideration. By making settings for our lives – whether they are material, social or cultural – we also limit, direct or re-direct our own epistemic and moral freedom and autonomy, as well as our beliefs. The relationship between material settings and beliefs can be described as reciprocal: “When acting responsibly, societies will endeavour to create structures that embody the beliefs and values they hold.” We tend, moreover, to “develop more respectful attitudes towards environments that we perceive them as taking care of us, promoting our well-being, and providing us with pleasurable experiences.”

Albert Borgmann’s philosophy of technology is an attempt to theorise the impact of the practices in regard to material things to the cognitive contents of moral beliefs. Having a background in pragmatism, Borgmann offers yet another philosophical discussion which includes lines of thought that cross with what is here articulated as an ecologically relational notion of agency. Borgmann argues that the very agency is bound to the virtuousness of the relationships with nature. Virtues can be understood in terms of epistemic and moral attention and skill. According to Borgmann, “epistemological advantage” entails taking engaged (that means, virtuous) relationships with material things rather than instrumental ones. The “sensibility of the body” is “sharpened and strengthened in skill”. Related to his famous device paradigm, Borgmann argues for “real ethics” rooted in virtuous everyday life practices. The device paradigm explains the mechanism of how everyday life practices direct and limit our moral possibilities if our relationship to the material world is an instrumental one. The paradigm talks about why people put so much hope in technology. For the benefits of technology, people trust in its possibility to remove much of human misery by its liberating power: it can, it is thought, free people from cold, hunger and darkness. But besides this, technology is connected to happiness: a vision of the good life is linked with technologically shaped practical lives. By addressing the twofold aim of liberation and prosperity to technology, people commit themselves to its continuous domination. Thus, beside in a way liberating us from certain necessities, technology also ties us to passive consumption, because as a practice it alters our understanding of the good life and standards of living. This means that the view of the good life becomes limited and moral culture degenerates.

The situation described in the device paradigm is conceptually generated by instrumental relationship with the material world. Understanding the material world as “devices” instead of “things” involves a denial of the meaning and depth of the relationships between “us” and “it” in our very agency for a good life. A “device” as a concept implies a relation that does not need engagement. “Things”, as Borgmann 625

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625 Preston 2009, 180-1, 185. He exemplifies this by a story about Amish people, who maintain the type of life they conceive to be sustainable. Preston 2009, 179-80. For the Amish story, see David Orr’s The Nature of Design: Ecology, Culture, and Human Intention (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). On naturalised epistemology, see Preston 2003, 21-3, 55, 74, 107, 134.

626 Borgmann 1984, 42; Strong and Higgs 2000, 28.

627 Borgmann 1984, 2006; Preston 2010, 6. Besides the environmental philosophers, Borgmann was among the first philosophers to extend the contextual engagement of moral language to material and physical contexts.

wishes material things to be conceived, calls for an active relationship and commitment that requires attention and the skills of relationality. A “device” conceptually divides between means and ends, while “things” combine them. According to Borgmann, as conceptions of good are constructed in relation to the realities we live in, modified by our daily practices, environments are ethically ‘thick’ already before any moral reflection. One cannot choose values freely. Construction of physical environments can then either limit or enhance our very freedom to choose our ways of life. This means that material practices bear hidden norms. Attention should be paid to the moral import of material environments, and practices that advance relational skills with regard to the environment should be objectively valued. The mechanism described in the argument holding between practical material relationships and the meaning of moral concepts seems highly convincing: changes in practices influence the epistemic and moral conditions of knowledge production. The result depends on the personal wisdom and public virtues practised in everyday life. That for Borgmann is ethics as its best.

3.3.5 REASONING AS RELATIONAL

An important challenge that relational agency poses to moral philosophy is concluded by Christopher Preston: “As empirical studies of mind have granted increasingly more significance to embodiment, and as epistemology has become increasingly more richly naturalised, reason has started to look like an activity of engagement and involvement with the world rather than of detachment from it.” Relational knowledge construction – regarded not just as socially, but also ecologically, bodily and geographically situated – thus sets requirements for the concept of rationality. What is then required for an action to be rational? Considering operations for rationality as relational implies, most notably, that instrumental reasoning is not enough for moral rationality. Instead, for valid reasoning an agent needs to enter into various dialogues, listen to material partners and collaborate. This poses critical questions concerning the requirements of impartiality and detachment. A simple case is to consider practical rationality. The standard model of practical rationality combines some cognitive content with the directive intentional element. The directive element expresses, as a matter of course, justified motivation for action. The rationality of an action can be evaluated by evaluating either the logical relation between the premises or the content of the cognitive premises. The major premise expresses value, moral belief or preference, while the minor premises are facts:

Major premise: Climate change should not be increased.
Minor premise: Charcoal burning increases climate change.

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629 Borgmann 1984, 42; Strong and Higgs 2000, 28-9.
630 Strong and Higgs 2000, 29. Borgmann’s notion that splitting between means and ends alienates the human agent from her own nature is widely shared among environmental philosophers.
633 Borgmann 2006, 99-140.
634 Preston 2003, 114.
Conclusion: Charcoal burning should not be practised.

In modern ethics, the difference between the premises entails their different sources: cognitive premises emerge from epistemic processes independent of the value premise, while the value ingredient expresses the intention of the agent or a collective. In modernist ethics, moral rationality is conceived as instrumental: epistemic premises are means for intentions to be effectively realised.\textsuperscript{635} I argue that if we take the relational nature of epistemic processes seriously, the relationship between premises appears to be much more complex than the instrumentalist view of rationality offers. This is because rational conclusions entailing the same major premise together with an objectively true or scientifically justified minor premise vary due to the truth value of the factual premise. The standard form of practical reasoning supposes that intellectual premises are objective in the sense that the attitude or previous actions do not make changes in it. However, even in a very simple case, rational action at one moment makes a change in the truth value of the factual premise at the next moment. Hence, the same action would not be rational. Compare, for example, the following:

- **Major premise:** The CO\textsubscript{2} level in the atmosphere is increasing, which is ok but not preferable.
- **Minor premise:** Forests control the CO\textsubscript{2} level of the atmosphere (true at moment one).
- **Conclusion:** Forests are preferable.

The conclusion is rational due to the truth of the minor premise. However, lack of action, that is, active control of the CO\textsubscript{2} level increase (as it is ok) may change the factual ability of the forests to control the CO\textsubscript{2} level. The scientifically justified minor premise thus loses its validity due to the changes caused by either the lack of intentional action or previously rational intentional action. At a certain point, moment two, the CO\textsubscript{2} level in the atmosphere changes the situation and the rational argument:

- **Major premise:** The CO\textsubscript{2} level in the atmosphere is increasing, which is ok, but not preferable.
- **Minor premise:** Forests increase the CO\textsubscript{2} level of the atmosphere (true at moment two).
- **Conclusion:** Forests are not preferable.

This is a simple example, while the connection between the premises is, in fact, very complex. Five points seem to be important here. First, since actions are heavily directed by the values and beliefs expressed in the major premise, the selection of the major premise seems to dominate the whole syllogism. Second, if actions change not only some separate external facts rather than the ecological conditions of the agent’s

\textsuperscript{635} The flaw of the hardwired position can be located in the included model of causation, which is a crude one. As an environmentalist Anthony Weston argues, “the only alternative to being purely a cause is not to be purely an effect”. A plausible model of causation should take ecological relationality into account: “Causation in complex, interdependent, and evolving systems with multiple feedback loops – that is, an ‘ecological’ conception of causation – is a far better model.” Weston 1996, 145.
life, they may also change the agent’s preferences concerning the major premise. As a result of changed ecological conditions the agent’s preferences and moral capability, the very meaning of “ok” and “preferable” do change. The conclusion “forests are not preferable” is logically valid, but the practical consequences from just acting in accordance with it would be disastrous from the point of view of the major premise (what is meant by “ok” or “not preferable”). Third, attitudes heavily direct the attention of a rational agent. And when relationally interacting with social and ecological others, the self-construction of an agent is directed more by those partners to which an agent has a positive attitude and gives attention. The attitude expressed in the major premise thus influences the knowledge formation for the minor premises. The agent’s liability for the truth value or reliability of the factual premises covers her responsibility for the chosen major premise. Fourth, in turn, beliefs concerning the truth of the minor premises may limit (through self-construction and identity) the agent’s freedom to choose the major premises (values and intentions), as Borgmann shows in the device paradigm. Fifth, the interaction between intentions and epistemic beliefs has an impact on the agent’s epistemic skills. Skills advance by practising. In the case of relational agency, the epistemic skills required in order to formulate correct cognitive premises cannot be distinguished from the skills of relational cooperation. However, relational cooperation requires a certain attitude towards those with whom/which one cooperates: an attitude of recognition, respect and perhaps even care. Intentions and epistemic contents thus seem complexly interrelated and together they are influential for the agent’s future capacities of rational reasoning.

Instrumental rationality has been especially criticised by environmental ethicists, despite the fact that the alternatives are philosophically diverse. At an early stage of discussion on environmental rationality, John Dryzek criticised dominant environmental ethics about adopting instrumentalist rationality. In times when there were powerful arguments for metaphysical alternatives he argued that environmentalists should not replace “anthropocentric moral rationalism” with “ecological anti-rationalism” and turn to “spirituality, religion, feeling, and intuition”, since such replacements would only confirm binding ourselves to the post-Enlightenment rationalist dichotomy. Instead, he urged a critical revision of the very concepts of reason and rationality. With the help of Jürgen Habermas’s idea of communicative reason, Dryzek argued in favour of extended communicative reason, which he called ecological rationality, in order to incorporate procedural standards that “are not obviously intrinsic to human discourse” but are “essential to good order in human interactions with the natural world”. Human intelligence should be seen as a “symbiotic intelligence” in which both human and natural properties have their roles. According to Dryzek, making all epistemic interactions as equal as possible generates a rationality that is as objective as possible for imperfect

638 Dryzek 1987, 118-20; Dryzek 1990, 198-99, 202-04. He argues that human rationality is not totally different from the “rationality” of nature, exemplified in its self-regulating systems.
Communication is a means to achieve objectivity. Dryzek’s ecological rationality has a loose link with the relational approach through the idea that equal interaction should be seen as a virtue of intelligence.

Ecofeminists Val Plumwood, Jim Cheney and Donna Haraway defend a different type of interactive argument. According to them, meanings are constructed together with the “objects” to which we share the agency, which means that external nature has an active impact on reasoning. Humans have ecologically mislocated themselves in modernism: by dreaming about independence from material limits, they detached moral culture from scientific and technological interests and, consequently, distorted the concept of human agency. According to Plumwood, the juxtaposition between naturalism and rationalism has its origins in the limited view of reason in the modern narrative. Rather than selecting between trust in reason and trust in nature, she calls for a revised understanding of reasoning, namely ecological rationality. Rationalism fails to give a whole picture of the complexity of reason if it lacks an awareness of “ecological embeddedness, nature’s agency and limits, and human dependency on the non-human sphere”, or excludes bodility and senses from knowledge production.

The relationality defended by environmentalists indicates that moral knowledge is something that can only be approached through wide intersubjectivity, relational recognition and caring actions. Ethics, or etiquette, as some would call it, is “a condition of knowing the world itself”. Moral concepts refer to knowledge as an “actively constructed portrait [...] intended to be responsibly true, one which rings true for everybody’s well-being”. The moral approach to knowledge construction represents ethics-based epistemology. According to that, what can be known partly depends on the non-representational aspects of that epistemic relationship. Knowledge construction requires recognition and space for things to be known: valuing and disvaluing are epistemic methods. As knowledge is never reducible to its building blocks, intentional actions play a role in the epistemic process. The fact that various dialogues are responsible for rationality should entail modest conceptions of knowledge, certainty and truth. Plumwood aspires to “care models of knowledge”.

639 Dryzek 1990, 207-08. However, Dryzek did not give up the argument from analogy, and could not, I think, thoroughly exploit the possibilities of ecological rationality. See Dryzek 1990, 204-7.
641 It is worth noting that the reason to extend the view of moral culture is considered to be environmental sustainability, while extension of rationality to ecological rationality is needed because of sustainable society. For the former, see e.g. Plumwood 2009.
644 Cheney & Weston 1999, 119, 120, 126, 134. By talking about etiquette rather than ethics Cheney and Weston argue that the cases in which we fail to be ethical are not necessarily failures of ethics, but rather, failures of our moral agency.
646 Defended by Jim Cheney and Anthony Weston, for example. Cheney & Weston 1999.
648 Therefore, Plumwood calls for transformation in relation to knowledge in science. The failure of rationality concerns the separation between the narrative of the knowing subject and the narrative of the
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which could break the radical subject/object division and allow agency to the known. Knowledge of what valid epistemic relationships amount to would form a ground for an ethically-integrated science of care.649

Two aspects characterise the cognitive processes as ecologically relational. First, epistemic processes are fundamentally dialogical or communicative in the sense that they exceed the community of human individuals. Cognitive processes involve objects and subjects of knowledge as cooperating partners in knowledge formation. Hence, non-human individuals and ecological wholes, like species and ecosystems, should be seen to be included in the process rather than be excluded as objects.650 Valid reasoning thus requires an agent to enter into various types of dialogues, to “listen” to the material and other partners, to “recognise” them, and to collaborate with them. Second, cognitive and attitudinal elements are interrelated in reasoning in a way that makes the process of reasoning itself a moral issue. Environments carry the impact of human footprints, design and manipulation. Whether it is Manhattan or an arctic village, modified or left wild, the environment in which the agent is embedded has an epistemic value that plays a role in moral reasoning.651 An agent is morally responsible for the epistemic conditions she creates by her daily practices.652

What does this imply for an understanding of the concept of rationality? Both aspects highlight the fact that moral rationality should not be used as a detached or neutral concept. The division between first-person will and objective moral reason, as it is considered in traditional moral realism, is too strict from the point of view of a relational conception of reasoning. Moral action considered as a free, knowledge-based choice ties moral rationality to implausible conceptions of cognitive, as well as intentional, agency. An instrumental, unilateral conception of rationality allows only extreme options for the self-understanding of ethics: reductionist naturalism and detached rationalism. I argue that a relationally revised conception of moral rationality calls for a more complex understanding of moral reasoning, which again calls for new perspectives to a mutual relationship between moral reason and the normative force of ethics, often considered a problem for moral realism.653

One of the recent arguments for crossing the strict division between instrumental rationality and intention comes surprisingly from evolutionary moral psychology. Michael Tomasello’s interdependence hypothesis argues that due to natural human interdependencies the structures of rationality are fundamentally cooperative in the modern culture. Cooperative rationality thus cannot have an instrumental role in

known natural object. She calls for “an ethical science”, which is “dialogical, non-reductionist and self-reflective”. Plumwood 2002, 52-3.

649 “Caring rationality sees ethics and social responsibility as a crucial part of science and of the scientist’s task.” Plumwood 2002, 54-5.

650 Mary Midgley’s conception of “mixed communities” has been used in exemplifying this. See Weston 2009, 5-6; Plumwood 2002, 165-6; Peterson 2001, 237; Midgley 1978.


652 Jim Cheney, for instance, links the relativity of human existence (as the ground for ethics) to the concrete changes in the surrounding environment. “[E]cological descriptions, as they change, force us to rewrite accounts of human existence, value, and moral community […] Better, perhaps, if we think instead of the co-evolution (and ultimate inseparability) of values and description.” Cheney 2005, 106. See also Plumwood 2002, 5-6.

653 This seems to hold for both those arguments that defend clear, even robust realism, and for constructivism. For the former, see e.g. FitzPatrick 2005; for the latter, see Korsgaard 1996, 2007b.
reasoning since it emerges evolutionally from second-personal, joint intentionality; we should even talk about collective rationality based on collective intentions.654

3.4 ACTING RELATIONALLY

3.4.1 RELATIONAL FREEDOM

The concept of freedom is central for a definition of moral agency. But definitions of freedom, in the sense of moral responsibility and reason for action, vary. Philosophers are anxious about relational descriptions of human operations mainly because of the possible threat caused to autonomy and moral responsibility. Both evolutionary explanations of human moral actions by relationally generated natural inclinations and constructivist explanations of responsibilities by socially reliable constructions based on dialogical communication for functioning society may threaten them: in hardwired forms, they reduce moral agency to external reality. A critical attitude towards individual reason on the basis of a relational definition of agency does not rule out the autonomy of ethics, but it challenges the modern conception of individual freedom and descriptions of the proper conditions for moral autonomy.655

The idea of radical freedom (defended by Kant, for example) of an individual is compromised by social and material determinants. The question of free will, hence, raises the philosophical question of compatibilism: Does psychological determinism rule out responsibility and the autonomy of ethics, or is it compatible with them? Or, as some philosophers put it: Is determinism conceptually distinguishable from intentional action? While defenders of compatibilism often refer to the conceptual or categorical difference between determinism and freedom, from the point of view of relational agency, this solution is not fully satisfactory.656 For one thing, it is not certain that causal determinism holds true for nature. For another thing, it is not necessary to think that moral responsibility should depend on whether or not causal determinism is true.657 Many compatibilists also argue that free will as the condition of acting for a reason should not be considered in the same way as free will as the condition of choosing not to act against good reason.658

654 See Tomasello 2016, 143-6, 148. According to Tomasello, “cognitive skills of shared intentionality (including cooperative communication) are evolved adaptations enabling individuals to better coordinate their collaborative and cultural activities”. These cognitive skills “structure the way that individuals understand their collaborative interactions and the participants in them”. Tomasello 2016, 150. For collective intentionality, see section 3.4.2.

655 The problem of freedom is also considered to challenge religious positions. See Visala 2009. Open questions remain even in the case of chastened and relational forms of naturalism and constructivism. For example, how much an individual is responsible for the (destructive) cultural lifestyles, or natural conditions that degenerate moral abilities, if his actions are embedded in those lifestyles and natural conditions rather than free deliberation? I argue that unlike reductionist contextual agency, the relational agency to which these types of questions refer, does not question the conceptual prerequisites of morality.

656 Notable new perspectives have been recently put forward in discussions about compatibilism, for instance by John Martin Fischer and Susan Wolf. However, it is only possible to make some very general notions about the issue within the limits of this study.

657 See, e.g. Fischer 2006, 6, and 2012, 118.

658 For example, Susan Wolf, Harry Frankfurt, Gary Watson and Peter Strawson.
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Philosopher of action Susan Wolf argues that the concept of freedom has been overemphasised as a condition of moral responsibility. According to her, the debate between compatibilism and incompatibilism usually adopts a symmetrical account of freedom: that conditions of freedom precede conditions of value, and freedom has a similar role both in the case that an agent performs a good action and in the case that he performs a bad one. Therefore, they cannot see beyond simple options. Wolf argues for an asymmetrical account of freedom: the conditions of being a free agent, an agent, “that is, whose actions are under his own control” (condition of freedom) can be distinguished from the conditions of being a moral agent, “that is, to whom moral claims apply” (condition of value). According to Wolf, the condition of freedom depends on the condition of value, not the other way around. The absence of psychological determinism is thus not required in order for an agent to be morally responsible. If moral freedom requires the absence of determinism, then interests cannot determine actions, or external things (that are not in the mind of an agent) cannot determine interests: an agent who is not psychologically determined “is so free as to be free from moral reasons”. As Wolf relativises will by claiming that (freedom of) will and (freedom to) act are not entirely separated (since will is bound to the reason for action), she departs both from the traditional incompatibilist view (that responsibility always requires freedom to do otherwise), and the compatibilist view (that freedom to do otherwise is never required), by claiming only that an agent can “act freely”.

Another philosopher of action, John Martin Fischer argues for semicompatibilism, according to which, responsibility does not require the capacity to “make a difference” in the external world. He argues that instead of “control over” one’s behaviour, it is enough for responsibility that an agent has “guidance control” for behaviour. An agent thus has some control and moral responsibility, even if causal determinism holds true. Fischer compares the value of a morally responsible action with the value of an artist’s self-expression. The agent is like the artist creating a sculpture that does not make any difference in the world, as the same sculpture could have been created by someone else. In Fischer’s view, the difference is in the agent’s own narrative: by creating the sculpture she expresses herself and constructs meaning.

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659 According to Wolf, “[w]hat we need in order to be responsible beings, […], is a suitable combination of determination and indetermination”. Wolf 1986, 228-9. There is a wide discussion going on about this issue, but it remains beyond the scope of this study. See, for instance, Bruce Waller, “A Metacompatibilist Account of Free Will: Making Compatibilist and Incompatibilists More Compatible,” Philosophical Studies 112(2003): 209-224.

660 Wolf 1986, 225-7. An action is psychologically determined, for example, if the agent acts for the reason of his interests, his interests being determined by the environment external to his mind. In order to be morally responsible for a bad act, an agent must not be psychologically determined, but in the case of a good act, moral responsibility does not require abandoning psychological determination. When a person has the right reasons to act, she could not do otherwise, but this should not lessen the praise she deserves. Wolf 1986, 230, 232. According to critics, however, Wolf’s definition of psychological determination is not totally identical with the standard definition of causal determination.


662 Fischer 2006, 8, 106, 113; Fischer 2012.
Wolf and Fischer exemplify the discussion that supports, I think, the view that there is open space for philosophical discussion about responsible agency – and processes for strengthening it – even within the limits of natural causalities.

An asymmetrical notion of freedom, for instance, highlights a positive determination to act morally, which seems to maintain the idea of relational agency. Wolf’s account serves as an example about the idea that a positive link can be seen between the psychological – and perhaps also a causal – determination and action for a moral reason. My supposition is that from the point of view of what has been said about relational agency so far, both incompatibilism and the type of compatibilism that is grounded on an absolute categorical difference between causal and intentional activities are unconvincing. If we take causal and intentional elements in the agency to be conceptually and categorically interlinked (if not in the same category) rather than totally separated categories, relational agency refers to their mixed coexistence in the self-expressions of agency. Intentionality, however (which is the closest concept to use for the condition of responsibility, instead of using the vague concept of freedom), should not be restricted to what is internal to the individual mind. In this sense, ecological relationality could add a new perspective to the discussion: a part of our very agency (the one that determines the action of self-expression, as well as that of “making a difference” in the world, if one believes it is possible) is involved in the external social, material and cultural heritage. This does not rule out, I think, that one could hold the position defended by Fischer. Whether or not creating a sculpture makes any difference in physical reality (supposing that “physical” and “mental” are separated categories), it does not rule out the possibility that the case in the real world may be that the meanings and narratives the agent constructs and expresses for herself do in fact have some physical influences. It is not, at least, totally absurd to believe in the possibility of things being intertwined in a way that will show the prevalent view about causal determinism to be too hardwired.

Widening the perspective, for a relational understanding of moral agency, the determinants may be various. But despite the limitations of various explanations, determinants, such as knowledge, self-understanding, identity, place and the past are not just threats to responsibility but are also important for the possibilities for morally good action in an actual situation. Besides dictating human actions, even causal determinants may be seen as the consequences of resulting processes in which the meanings given to life and action play a role. Absolute freedom is not necessary for moral responsibility. Neither are explanations of relative freedom or intentionality required in order to secure one’s detachment and immunity, but rather, the role that “freedom” plays in the context of relational agency is that it helps to construct one’s moral character in cooperation with mental and material external factors. One cannot

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663 Fischer 2006, 114-7. “[W]e value the artist’s activity not because he makes a certain sort of difference to the world, but because he expresses himself in a certain way. He does not make a difference; but he does make a statement.” (114). “[W]hat is expressed by an agent in acting is the meaning of the sentence of the book of his life. And this meaning is fixed in part by relationships to other sentences in this book, that is, by the overall narrative structure of the life.” This, Fischer argues “suggests a more ‘holistic’ picture of what gets expressed by an agent […] than the mere fact that the agent had a pro-attitude toward moving his body in a certain way” (p. 116).
avoid performing one’s character when acting, but the character is not fixed. A virtue theorist would say that virtuous personality results from complex processes involving various others, but since the virtues are internalised, the person is inclined to perform good actions as if she could not do otherwise.

Arguments for the extended mind and embodied cognition also offer notions about the limited role of freedom in moral action. Some argue for a kind of chastened conception of freedom. According to Mark Johnson’s embodied philosophy, for example, ethics does not need Kantian radical freedom, which supposes that “we are, or possess, a transcendent ego that is the locus of our capacity to negate any bodily, social, or cultural influence, habit, or tendency”. The idea that we are “free to choose who and what we shall become” is too radical for this embodied and contextualised view of human agent. But according to Johnson, humans have freedom to contribute “to transformations of our situation, and thereby to self-transformations”.665

In environmental ethics the philosopher’s concern for freedom of moral choice and responsibility appears especially in discussions in which evolutionary psychologists take part. Freedom, but especially action for a moral reason becomes threatened by those evolutionary explanations that reduce intentional actions to evolved emotions. They often also define ethics as a social adaptation to those emotions. This kind of reduction may thus reject not only freedom of will, but also moral reasons.666 In this context, it is worth examining the question of freedom also from the viewpoint of philosophy of emotions.

The influence of the constitutive contextuality of human nature on freedom and responsibility is widely discussed, for example, by Robert Solomon and Naomi Sheman. Solomon argues for an embodied conception of freedom. In contrast to Kantian free choice, which supposes the ‘Will’ to be a distinctive ‘faculty’ in the mind of a metaphysical ‘subject’, Solomon argues that freedom is connected with “the rest of a person’s character, circumstances, and culture, including his or her reflections on these”. Therefore, freedom should be evaluated in relation to the narrative of one’s life: acts or emotions that fit and make sense in one’s life story can be recognised as free – and imply responsibility – even though these actions are “inattentive, only quasi-intentional, habitual, spontaneous, or even ‘automatic’”.667 The concept of agency covers, in Solomon’s view, far more aspects of humanity than the limited realms of the will and reason.668 He argues, for instance, that emotions are

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664 At this point it becomes clear that works by some recent neo-Kantian philosophers, especially Christine Korsgaard, concerning the normative status of self-constitution are interesting from the point of view of ecologically relational agency. The idea of the virtue-based construction of moral capabilities, present especially in Martha Nussbaum’s works, also underlines the will as bound to the reason of action in the constitution of one’s agency.


667 Solomon 2004, 206. Mark Rowlands’s argument about the freedom and non-reductivity of emotions in The Nature of Consciousness (2001) poses a similar idea. Explanatory reduction, Rowlands argues, can reach the phenomenal aspects of consciousness that belong to its object, but not those aspects that belong to the act of consciousness. However, according to him, both aspects belong to “what consciousness is”. From this point of view, he argues we cannot simply say that reduction of consciousness is either possible or not possible. But we can say that it is never complete. Rowlands 2001, 219.

668 Solomon, 2004, 204-6. Compare also to John Hyman’s argument against both confrontation and reduction of the different dimensions of agency in Hyman 2015.
judgements, or acts, for which an agent is responsible. Although not always deliberately chosen (in the Kantian sense), one remains responsible for them. Analogically, choosing one’s values is deeply tied to the non-conscious and quasi-intentional elements of an agent, but nevertheless, if the value “fits and makes sense” in the agent’s life, it can be called freely chosen. According to this view of freedom, “how we think about our emotions – as something we suffer or as something we “do” – will deeply affect both our behaviour and our understanding of our behaviour. In other words, theses about emotions, like those about values, tend to be self-conforming. The meaning of emotions and values is constructed in social and material relations.

Naomi Sheman criticises two predominant suppositions concerning emotions: that emotions are states of individuals, and that they are mostly inimical to the achievement of moral objectivity. According to her, emotions are complex, constellation-like entities, the coherence of which “is relative to irreducible social, contextual explanatory schemes”. In Sheman’s relational account of emotions, material relations are intertwined with social and normative ones in emotions. There is a mutual influence between emotions and moral judgements. Behind this idea is the view of emotions as discursive or dialogical, constructed in between different beings, and relying on social meanings. Sheman argues that besides being an important fact that the emotions engage us with others, this mutuality is especially important for the objectivity of moral judgement, because through the influence derived from emotions we are more capable of moral reasoning. Instead of being inimical, thus, emotions enhance achievement of moral objectivity. This Sheman takes to be the important link between constructivism and moral objectivity in ethics.

### 3.4.2 COLLECTIVE AGENCY AND THE MEANING OF RELATIONSHIPS

Intentionality is normally connected with expressions of individual freedom. However, notable lines of thought in both the empirical sciences and philosophy emphasise that operations of the mind, reasoning and intentionality may be considered in some cases to be collective activities. They offer explanations for collective actions and even appoint responsibilities to collectives as agents. Addressing rationality and intentionality to collectives or group agents is important.

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669 Solomon 2004, 232. See also page 210 and his earlier books.
670 Sheman 1996, 222.
672 Sheman 1996, 234. “(A)s we become better at the forms of emotional engagement that allow the emotional resources, in particular of those whose perspective have been subordinated, to become articulated and to be taken seriously by themselves as well as by the relatively privileged, then the terms of the descriptive apparatus for our emotional lives shift, which then allows for even more articulation of emotionally informed perceptual responses, and so on. What appeared to be a problematic circle is in fact a spiral, and if we have defined objective judgments as those that we have good reason to believe have been subjected to effective critique, existing in contexts that allow for the future possibility of future critique – that is, judgments that we have good reason to believe are stable across a wide range of different perspectives and that will shift, if they do, not capriciously but intelligibly – then it follows that the social constructedness of emotions and the ineliminable role of emotions in moral judgment work together in order to provide the possibility of moral objectivity.”
Relational moral agency

from the point of view of environmental responsibilities and it opens up new possibilities for normative discussion on environmental issues. But I suppose it also elucidates the role of interactivity between the determinants of social rationality for the moral responsibilities of both individuals and collectives. In this sense, it can help in understanding the relational mechanisms of moral agency as providing non-individualistic responsibilities.

An action can be called collective due to some special collectively directed intentions. Three main meanings of collective agency can be distinguished: (1) John Searle argues that collective intentions are non-summative actions of separate individuals, while (2) Michael Bratman understands them mainly as “shared intentions” of interrelated individuals, and (3) Margaret Gilbert and Raimo Tuomela argue that there are also we-mode intentions that are operations of distinctive collective agents. The collective nature of these operations create such features in the group that it should be considered as a responsible agent. David Copp develops the idea of social rationality, mainly according Bratman’s position, and argues that this social rationality has normative force for the agency of collectives, which refers to Tuomela’s position. I shall refer later to Copp’s view especially, since it seems an example that emphasises the relational nature of the agency of collectives.

Gilbert argues for a strong collective agency. According to her, several individuals can form a plural subject that has collective intentions and intentional states, such as beliefs about the moral aims, when the individuals form a joint commitment to act as a body. This means that a collection of individuals acts or believes as a distinctive subject. Therefore, social rules should be seen as joint commitments of the society. Addressing moral agency to collectives, as Gilbert does, arises interesting questions: whether and how collectives can have reasons for action of their own, and whether and how motivation of an individual’s action can be derived from a collective goal. Tuomela’s theory of group reasons develops answers to these questions.

Tuomela distinguishes between two types of social reasons for action: “I-mode” reasons and “we-mode” reasons. For an “I-mode”, group action holds that members of the group share each other’s intentions as individuals. Reasons for intending a collective action are thus individual, private “I-mode” reasons. As a group, however, the members have a joint plan to be realised, and therefore, each member commits to the collective action. In contrast to that, a “we-mode” reason for collective action is a reason of the group agent. It is reason “a group has for performing its action as a group. In turn, a group reason is a reason that a group gives to its members for their

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673 Searle 1990, 406. I shall not go further into this since other perspectives are more relevant for the topic.
674 See Bratman 2007; Bratman 1993.
677 Gilbert also argues that “the plural subject approach allows not only for collective belief but for collective reasoning”. Margaret Gilbert, Joint Commitment: How We Make the Social World (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press), 72.
679 Tuomela 2013, 70-2; Tuomela 2006, 35, 39-40. For example, “[s]uppose two drivers, you and I, are coming from opposite directions, and we get out of our cars to remove a fallen tree from the road, our shared goal of course to get the tree removed from the road. We share that goal in the I-mode – based on our private reasoning that we will do the job together (as both are physically needed for it).” Tuomela 2013, 72.
actions as individual group members.” When a group agent has a we-mode reason, the members have a group reason to act in accordance as members of the group. In the “we-mode” collective agency, the members “are assumed to function on the basis of their ‘we-thinking’ and ‘we-acting’ compatible with the group’s ethos.” A we-mode intention, then, is accepted by a group member qua group member. We-mode intention is one that satisfies three criteria: a group reason, a special collectivity condition derived from the members’ being ‘in the same boat’, and a collective commitment. It should be noted, however, that this is not an essentialist notion implying a collective agent, but a functional notion referring to group agency.

Tuomela’s notion of group reason is especially interesting for the argument provided in this study for two reasons: first, it emphasises the creative role of interactivity, and second, the interactive way of producing collective reasons implies individual motivation. For the first, Tuomela argues that collective attitudes of the members are products of the complex interactions in the group. We-mode intentions and actions are thus irreducible to I-mode intentions and actions. Interaction by which we-mode states are created, provides an additional element: collective reason is more than the sum of individual reasons. The synergy effects from interaction cause the situation in which the group agent’s actions and attitudes can emerge, and therefore, the group agent’s reasons cannot be put in terms of private attitudes even when practised by individuals. The function of the group agent depends on the member’s functioning compatibly with the group ethos. However, because of the synergy and interaction effects, the ethos of the group agent is not reducible to the individuals’ attitudes. This means that changes in the group agent’s attitudes take place through changes in both attitudes of the members and in the changed interaction. I argue that this indicates the relational nature of collective agency. Applied to normative environmental ethics this implies that environmentally when harmful practices result from collective agency, moral criticism should be targeted at the interactions in the composition of the group, besides the attitudes of individual members.

For the second point, the interactive way of providing collective reason implies that the motivation of an individual to act is not necessarily reducible to the individual attitudes or reasons. Motivation can also be addressed to the individual by the group reason, which is significantly influenced by the interactivity of the group in question. Reasons provide motivation for action to those who have them. But reasons providing individual motivation consist of different kinds of reasons: individual reasons or we-mode group reasons based on the group agent’s attitudes and activity. According to Tuomela, there are we-mode reasons “both for individual and joint action”. This implies that the very agency in group reasoning is beyond the set of the individual

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680 Tuomela 2012, 404-5.
681 Tuomela 2013, 69; Tuomela 2012, 405.
682 Tuomela 2016, 306-8; 2010. It makes a difference, thus, whether to use the term agent or agency. The focus of this study is also on agency, namely functional rather than ontological relationality.
683 Tuomela 2006, 50-1; Tuomela 2012, 406-7; Tuomela 2013, 91-3. Group reason is irreducible “(even) to we-mode attitudes” of the members. “The group agent’s reasons yield and warrant member-level group reasons”, and “both a group agent’s reason and a member’s group reason are we-mode reasons”. Tuomela 2012, 407.
684 Tuomela 2012, 409-10.
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members. I-mode reasoning of a pro-group may motivate a different kind of behaviour than we-mode collective reasoning in the same situation.685 Reasons formulated interactively generate different actions than reasons formulated individualistically. This means that interactivity – or relationality – plays an important role in the reasons for action and in the motivation of both individual and group actions. According to Tuomela, human agents are generally disposed to engage in both we-mode and I-mode thinking and acting without supposing either perspective to be conceptually primary.686 From the point of view of an individual, there then seem to be various levels of agency in which different rationalities take place.

Taking a step from the level of collective agency downward to the level of individual agency, I suggest that Tuomela’s view can be interpreted to support the idea of relational agency at this level, too. The relational composition of agency at the level of individual reasoning has analogical features with the idea of we-mode collective agency. The partnerships considered to be determinants for individual reasoning can be seen to form a collective agency in the individual human mind. This agency is irreducible to the activity or influence of each partner or to the sum of them. If this analogy works as I suppose, an individual agency is in a way a collective of various sub-individual members constitutive for the individual’s identity, knowledge and attitudes. This interpretation of Tuomela’s view implies that two issues should be recognised as decisive for the reason and motivation of an individual agent: an aggregation of the partners each having an impact on individual agency on the one hand, and the interactivity between different partners forming the irreducible composition of the individual agency on the other.

Michael Bratman argues for a reductive account of shared activity and collective intentionality: collective intentionality does not require a concept of group agency but can be based on the members’ I-mode actions. This is, Bratman argues, because intentions should be understood as plans, which means that intentions are closely connected to action. Hence, agency should be approached from the perspective of action rather than that of psychological identity.687 Bratman emphasises interrelatedness and participatory intentions, which are related in a distinctive way: A condition for shared activity is that each participant intends that the subplans of each participant mesh when they follow upon the participatory intentions. Sharing produces a special bond that interlocks intentions.688 Commitment to consistency and coherence as norms for an individual intention requires the participants to formulate their individual plans and intentions with an eye towards consistency and coherence with the other’s plans and intentions. In Bratman’s view, the others’ intentions thus have authority for the agent through some kind of “bridge intention” to mesh individual plans with those of others. This refers interestingly to a relational bond

685 The difference performs itself especially in regard to aspirations for egalitarianism in the group. Tuomela 2013, 190-3.
686 Culturally, however, one may be seen as psychologically primary, but most usually I-mode thinking. Tuomela 2013, 93.
687 Bratman 2007, 26-8.
688 Tollefsen & Gallagher 2017, 98; Bratman 1992, 331ff, 340. Each participant must be committed to having her subplans mesh, because the lack of this commitment would lead to a lack of cooperation, since participants may disregard others’ subplans.
between the individual intentions as the subplans for actions. But it also means that
the stability of shared agency is not bound to psychological continuity but to
psychological connections.\textsuperscript{689} One way to overcome the weak stability of shared
agency is to emphasise the role of we-narratives in the narrative notion of the self.\textsuperscript{690}
It seems that Bratman also offers some support to the argument for relational agency.
Relational agency, in the sense that the concept is used in this study, does not
necessarily require a concept of collective group agent, but it questions the nature of
I-mode intentions and actions as separate monads.

David Copp adds to Bratman’s view with the idea of the normative force of social
rationality: social rationality is a normative notion for those who belong to the
collective. The glue that makes collective agency something “more” than the set of
member individuals’ agency is thus the normative force of social rationality. The
requirement of meshing one’s intentions with those of others is among the central
norms for individuals.\textsuperscript{691} Social rationality functions as the glue between different
participants, each of which may have a very different rationality.\textsuperscript{692} The nature of
rationality is thus to be a normative notion that functions as the glue between those
who require each other as intertwined partners. When members of the collective carry
out actions, the responsibility they have is not totally reducible to their individual
intentions. Copp argues that responsibility and even autonomy can be addressed to
the collectives, although they are not independent agents.\textsuperscript{693}

Collective agency does not, however, release the members from being involved in
actions or responsibility. But the focus here is, according to my interpretation, not on
the members’ actions \textit{qua} individuals rather than \textit{qua} active participators to the
constitution of the collective. The important thing is that as members of the collective
they are partly responsible for the interactivity that makes the collective what it is,
namely the social “glue”. As producers of social rationality, they are responsible for
the reasons that are current in society. Copp thus argues that the intentional moral
agency of an individual is a function that extends to social collectives: it spreads
beyond the individual mind and body as boundaries of an individual agent.\textsuperscript{694} The
intentional state of a collective does not, basically, differ from that of an individual
agent, since both intentional states are relational states. He even suggests that,
perhaps, “agency individualism should be taken off the table”.\textsuperscript{695} The definition of
intentionality as relational is an interesting perspective: understanding the central operations of agency to be relational states allows us to ask whether influential participators in operations are necessarily rational persons, or can the collective include different types of participating elements. In my view, the glue considered as interactivity implies that the only thing required is that the relationship between participants is interactive. This is not, however, clear in Copp’s view. In any case, he focuses on interrelatedness, which plays a central role even for the normativity of social rationality.

Notions of collective moral agency are linked with explanations of the origins of non-instrumental normative reasons for an intelligent social species. Michael Tomasello argues that humans came to commit to cooperative partners by becoming responsive to non-instrumental normative reasons. The development of the features that depict the specific nature of moral rationality, including self-regulation and autonomy, are explainable by the relational nature of humans. First, it led to the conceptualisation of self-other equivalence: “collaborative partners (but not free riders) as equally important to instrumental success and equally evaluable by the same ideal standards”. Later, “the respect became not about power but about something like ‘deservingness’: if we are equivalent in the collaborative process, then we deserve equal treatment and benefits”. According to Tomasello, the self-regulation of a collective partly generates from strategic (instrumental) reasons, but not totally: it also has a moral dimension. The self-regulation by the plural agent becomes a part of the moral identity of its participants through them being relationally interconnected. So, the moral structure among the members must be based on “self-other equality” in order for the collective self-regulation to commit and obligate. Against the mainstream evolutionary explanations, Tomasello argues that this relational structure of self-regulation “constitutes a new kind of cooperative rationality based not only on instrumental success but also on a sense of fairness in one’s partner or compatriot to live up to our shared ideals”. Equality and impartiality are thus naturally understandable through the relationally structured plural subject.

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proposition as relata” (p. 297). For the conditions of collective intentional states to appear, see Copp 2006, 208; Copp 2015, 3396. Bratman differs from Copp here. See Bratman 2015, 3413.

696 But if collectives can be heterogenous, relationally constituted collective agency can be seen at various levels, and moral autonomy can be addressed to it regardless of whether all the members are individually autonomous agents or not.

697 See Tomasello 2016, 143-6, 148. In early human communities, interdependency evolutionally entailed shared intentional activities. People “could use their joint agent ‘we’ to make a joint commitment to self-regulate the collaborative activity. This joint commitment was created via the second-personal address of cooperative communication and assured that both partners would persist through distractions and temptations until both received their just deserts.” When internalised, this process entailed that the partners felt a sense of second-personal responsibility to the other. In modern cultural interaction, this caused “still another, scaled-up form of cooperative rationality: the cultural rationality of not just joint agency but cultural agency. The self-regulation of ‘we > me’ in modern humans therefore took the form of moral self-governance: the individual respecting and internalizing the objective values of the group – while at the same time questioning these and, where appropriate, providing her ‘reflective endorsement’ – as part of the moral identity.”

698 Tomasello 2016, 150.

699 “The social-interactive context for making a joint or collective commitment is to reduce the risk of a collaborative enterprise, and so the partners ‘agree’ that their constructed plural agent will self-regulate their joint or collective agency (‘we > me’). Agreeing to this kind of self-regulation, of course, has a strategic dimension – to not agree would be to risk one’s status as an attractive cooperative partner.
Especially interesting here is, I argue, that the conceptualisation of equality does not require (biological or mental) similarity rather than a commitment to collective collaboration, which makes the partners “equally important”. From the point of view of this study, this notion refers to the relational nature of humanity, which is entirely natural, but provides features that depict the exceptional type of reasoning required for moral agency. My preliminary supposition is that if the cooperative relationality of moral agency is confirmed in further studies on neuropsychology and other related empiric fields, it can form a conceptually combining element between reductive explanations and the authority of moral reasons for action.

The notions of collective agency refer to the structure and intentions constitutive of agency as morally meaningful. As in classical virtue ethics, individual agents are responsible for the kind of agency they have. But instead of talking about moral persons, I suggest we talk about relational agency that calls for the virtues of relational collectives. We-mode intentions or the glue between those sharing an activity are not, conceptually speaking, entities of their own, but impressionable relationships and activities. But once they emerge, they become constitutive for the collective agency and normative of all those taking part in the collective. We-mode intentions and the social glue exemplify the relational nature of (collective) agency. They mark a certain type of relationship between the partnering ones, and the quality of these relationships makes a difference in the normative structure.

The question that most worries moral philosophers in the empiric explanations of moral agency given by evolutionary naturalists and social scientists is, do the physical, mental, social and environmental conditions of rationality and intentionality compromise autonomy. I argue that the reason why autonomy becomes compromised by the explanations in which intentions are meshed to social and ecological relations, is in the individualistic understanding of moral agency. If rationality and intentionality are dedicated to an individual, as in mainstream modern Western ethics, autonomy is thought to refer to the unconditioned potential for action in an agent. But the moral subject, rationality, and intentionality can also be conceptualised in a way that rejects holding alienation from natural and social conditions as a prerequisite for them. Social and ecological “meshing” does not need to compromise – but at the same time it has a moral dimension as well. The moral dimension is that participants view self-regulation by the plural agent, including any sanctions it may mete out, as legitimate (desired), so it is part of the participants’ cooperative or moral identities. The sense of legitimacy is thus based both on the impartiality of the way it works – we agreed to sanction whichever of us does not live up to our role ideals (under a kind of ‘veil of ignorance’) – and on the concomitant possibility of role reversal evaluations such that individuals cannot help but evaluate themselves impartially, in the same way that they evaluate others. Both this impartiality of the joint commitment and this role reversal evaluation are, ultimately, based once more in a sense of self-other equivalence. This way of thinking and operating thus constitutes a new kind of cooperative rationality based not only on instrumental success but also on a sense of fairness in one’s partner or compatriot to live up to our shared ideals. Tomasello 2016, 151-2.

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700 See Tomasello 2016, 160-3. “[H]uman individuals recognize their interdependence with others and the implications this has for their social decision making. They have become cooperatively rational in that they factor into their decision making (1) that helping partners and compatriots whenever possible is the right thing to do, (2) that others are equally as real and deserving as themselves (and this same recognition may be expected in return), and (3) that a “we” created by a social commitment makes legitimate decisions for the self and valued others, which creates legitimate obligations among persons with moral identities in moral communities.” (p. 160). Tomasello deals with criticisms for his possibly “rosy picture” that combines evolutionary and cultural explanation, but the argument seems convincing. The discussion is still continuing, and consequently it is not possible to make any further notions here.
autonomy, but on the contrary, if considering moral operations to be relationally constructed, social and ecological constituents can be seen as partly constitutive for autonomy.

3.4.3 AUTONOMY AS A RELATIONAL NOTION

Relational autonomy is a concept used especially by feminist ethicists who criticise the ordinary use of the conception of autonomy. Feminist philosophers criticise the concept of autonomy especially concerning the implied conception of the uncontextualised, incorporeal, individual agent. Particularly in the field of bioethics, it is widely accepted that autonomy cannot be totally separated conceptually from the social and biological determinants of an agent.\textsuperscript{701} The ideal of an autonomous individual makes sense only together with “assumptions about selfhood and agency that are metaphysically, epistemologically and ethically problematic from a feminist perspective”.\textsuperscript{702} Lorraine Code, for example, calls such an ideal a “perversion”.\textsuperscript{703} In order to have practical relevance, the concept of autonomy should thus be re-conceptualised to take seriously the realities and conditions of human life and agency: relationally constructed autonomy is suggested to replace the conception of autonomy as an absolute and definite feature. Revisions made to the concept of autonomy in bioethics and in environmental ethics are in many respects congruent in the framework of feminist philosophy.

There are two clearly different ways to consider autonomy as relational: \textit{procedural} and \textit{interactive} autonomy differ with each other on the question whether the relationships practised are considered as a means to develop one’s autonomy or as constitutive for the very concept of autonomy. While the interactive view calls for a conceptual shift, the procedural concept of autonomy makes use of the psychoanalytic conception of self, according to which we need to be connected, cared for and guided in order to learn how to make our own choices. In concordance with this view, Marilyn Friedman argues that social relationships form the only proper means for humans to become autonomous as an individual.\textsuperscript{704} Therefore, according to her procedurally relational notion of autonomy, particular influences of our close relationships, such as the transference of cultural values and parental consulting, should not be seen as limits to autonomy. On the contrary, social upbringing and ongoing personal interactions are necessary conditions of autonomy because they impart resources for critical reflection and self-concept: an agent carries the normative and authoritative influence of her (early and close) relationships as conditions for her (later) autonomy. Freedom is included in “reflective self-understanding or internal coherence” and “an absence of [...] manipulation by

\textsuperscript{701} The positions of feminist bioethicists and medical ethicists are widely represented in Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (eds.), \textit{Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self} (2000), and the main implications for bioethics are introduced well in Nyrövaara 2011, 83-122.
\textsuperscript{702} Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, 3.
\textsuperscript{703} Code 2000, 184.
\textsuperscript{704} Friedman 2000, 40-1, 46. Philosophically this also has connections to recognition theories.
This view focuses on the constituents of autonomy as the socially constructed abilities of an individual to develop and express autonomy in her decisions. Autonomy needs an ability to act effectively on one’s values with the help of social impact. Procedural relational autonomy thus resembles the idea of emancipation.

According to the interactive notion of relational autonomy, defended for example by Catriona Mackenzie and Anna Peterson, it is not possible to separate autonomy from the conditions of action if the social and material embeddedness of a human agent is taken seriously. In contrast to the idea of radical freedom as the core of autonomy, autonomous choices should be understood as choices between constraint alternatives. Autonomy can be practised in the case of constraint freedom, too (and indeed it can be seen to construct the conditions of choices). By engaging oneself to humbly hold the conditions of one’s actions in social and ecological relationships relevant, an agent can make changes to those conditions. This is a part of autonomy when it is understood as an interactive concept. In my view, this echoes interestingly with what Tim Ingold describes from the viewpoint of an evolutionary anthropologist as action of trust, which marks the agent’s relationally dependent autonomy. Diana Meyers argues for autonomy competence, which includes self-reading and self-actualising skills. Instead of uninfluenced choices, autonomous agent practices skills of actualising oneself in relation with those influencing in her identity. The difference between being autonomous and failing to be autonomous is that an autonomous person is not passive but reflectively engages with the social determinants that partly shape her life.

While Friedman’s procedural notion considers relationships as servants for the separation, Peterson’s interactive notion considers relationships to be constitutive for autonomy. In Peterson’s notion, relationships are needed as constituents of rationality, by which the agent develops her virtuous identity to better morally engage with others. A relational notion of autonomy represents a virtue perspective on relational agency. Restrained rather than radical autonomy develops virtuousness: “The emphasis upon constraint and its ethical correlate restraint, points to a balance between recognizing our real power to construct and change the world, on the one hand, and the equally real limitations of that power, on the other.” Considering agency and included autonomy as relational concepts refers to a non-individualist conception of self: particular relationships that have constitutive power to the self imply that autonomy and self-governance are fundamentally relational, too.

Ecofeminists and other environmentalists inclined to talk about relational agency extend the relational constituents by adding the relationships with the material...
environment to either procedural or interactive account of autonomy. Val Plumwood, for example, while defending the interactive account, talks about cultural landscapes as products of mixed agency. Land, according to her, is a field of “multiple interacting and collaborating agencies, which can include humans but is never exhausted by them”. And in turn, the landscape influences the identity and knowledge formation, the agential abilities, and the value construction of an individual agent. Because these external elements take part, an environmentally extended version of collaborative agency includes the hope of genuinely new directions of development. According to my view, extending agential abilities beyond an individual mind does not weaken the weight of a human agent’s autonomy, or her responsibility. On the contrary, in accordance with the wider heritages of habits and creation of the environments and landscapes for other moral agents, a shared responsibility becomes more demanding than responsibility as an individual’s issue. Responsibility should be widened to concern the ecological and social structures that provide legitimate knowledge, too.

Ecological engagements can also be seen to procedurally develop the individual autonomy, as Friedman claims, but in the case of ecological relations, autonomy can never mean separateness or radical freedom. Instead, fruitful enhancement of ecological cooperation is a condition for both procedurally and interactionally considered autonomy. Personhood not only comes into existence through engagements, but it becomes potent to act morally (which is a part of the conceptual definition of autonomy) by not denying the engagements rather than making good use of them in collective agency. The relational eco-social features, such as gender, place, race, religion, social class, friends, landscapes and opportunities are not only necessary features from the point of view of autonomy, but they also shape our way of being a self and our modes of knowing. In the case of a moral agent, this implies that autonomy is a relational rather than an absolute thing, and the same concerns rationality. Consciousness and moral rationality are engaged operations rather than individual features.

A distinctive way to conceptualise autonomy is the one put forward by Christine Korsgaard in the neo-Kantian spirit. According to her, autonomy has to do with the relational self-constitution of the agent. She explores the borderline between autonomous and determined actions by defining and defending animal agency. Korsgaard aspires after a reconciliation between the evolutionary explanation of moral reasoning (naturally embedded) and moral autonomy (which requires normative self-governance). She accepts that “at least some of our mental attitudes are the products of the internalization: that our beliefs, desires, emotions, and so on, are the result of the new form of consciousness that emerged” (through evolution). While this is usually seen to implicate non-convergence of moral judgements, and

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711 Plumwood 2006, 125. For the concept of mixed agency, see e.g. Midgley 1983, 109-24.
712 The term ‘collaborative agency’ is Plumwood’s. See Plumwood 2006.
713 An individual agent becomes what it is through practising various social and other relationships in every section of life. Interestingly, the concept of relational moral agency is among the main reasons for ecofeminists to refuse holistic metaphysics as a relevant basis for environmental ethics. See e.g. Warren 2000, 166.
714 Becoming critical in some relationship is possible only with the help of the rest of our social and cultural relationships. Mackenzie 2000, 144.
hence, relativism (at least if we do not accept ethical non-naturalism), according to Korsgaard, it does not. The evolution of morality is not a story of specific contents of moral propositions but a story of normative commitment and the emergence of a normatively “self-governed animal.”

The origin of moral autonomy or self-governance is not, according to Korsgaard, in the awareness of our own mental attitudes, but in the relationships that we have with others: only in relationships can we acknowledge the interconnectedness between our attitudes and the way how the world is for us, and thus, distance our mental attitudes from the world. Mental attitude language has a feature that it can be used for distancing your attitude from the world by recognising that the way how the world seems to you is not the same as the way it seems to me, and that this is due to your attitudinal contribution to the way the world is for you. According to Korsgaard, in natural history we began to assume that we have control over ourselves, and our responses, because we recognised the influence we had on the other’s attitudes and, through that, to the way the world is for them. This resulted in an awareness of our own mental attitudes. Therefore, mental attitudes are first spotted in other people, and “we would never think of our own mind if we were never exposed to other people”. If we follow Korsgaard here, as seems justifiable, it means, first, that desires and attitudes should be seen as contributions to the way the world is for us, and second, that moral autonomy should be seen as a product of commitment, not an instantiation of unlimited individual freedom. But the content of commitment depends on the others to whom we are committed. So, self-governance has normative sources, and it binds us to the different others by whom we become aware of our own agency.

The disputed issue about the relationship between justification (resulting from a cognitive state of mind) and motivation (resulting from an attitudinal state of mind) finds a new location through analysis like the one Korsgaard gives. In contrast to juxtaposing cognitive justification and conative motivation, they are just different instantiations of how we use the attitude language about ourselves. Moral motivation does not just express the connectedness to our inner states but also to the connectedness to and interaction with the external states of the world. But such interaction brings about both belief and commitment, not just commitment.

I argue that taking autonomy as a relational concept makes the juxtaposition between semantic expressivism and semantic representationalism in moral language somewhat blurred, because it connects the meaning of moral concepts to moral

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716 Korsgaard 2010, 22-23.
718 “When we begin to recognize the ways that conceptualizing, evaluating, and responding to the world are things that our minds do – that is, things that we do – then we begin to do them in a whole new way, namely self-consciously. And then we are confronted with a new problem and a whole new set of questions, questions about what (if anything) counts as doing these things correctly. [...] And when we begin to find answers to those questions, then the use of mental attitude language about ourselves no longer carries the implication of distortion: instead it carries the implication of normative commitment [...]. To believe and act on the basis of such thoughts is to be a normatively self-governed animal.” Korsgaard 2010, 23.
autonomy, defined as an expression of the (real) ideal nexus. As expressions, moral concepts should be seen to express the ideal constitution of the normative commitments that the speaker has due to the ideal interrelationships to which his body and mind take part. Therefore, actual moral judgements express a state of body and mind that is an outcome of particular relationships, namely the actual constitution of the agency. Such an outcome is not, however, purely subjective (as it is according to the usual sense of expressivism) since it results from the interaction between empirically real partners. The idea could, perhaps, be developed further. In the case of the ideal constitution of the agency – which means that constitution of my agency commits me to all the niches in the nexus I live by (or partners with whom/which my agency realises), not limited to reasonable minds (social nexus) – the state to which my use of expressive concepts refers would be an outcome of something that is objective. Autonomous (moral) deliberation would then concur with (the moral, at least in the sense of morally all-encompassing) reality.

Be this as it may, the relational understanding of agency has the potentiality to refresh a Kantian theory. The idea of relational moral autonomy indicates that questions of justification, good reasons to act and good grounds for moral belief must be something to be approached by correct practising of relationships with those partnering in the constitution of one’s autonomy. According to Korsgaard, there is no conceptual difference between the relational constitution of human and animal agencies. She argues that self-determination can be used in two senses. In the first sense, to be autonomous or self-determined means “to be governed by the principles of your own causality, principles that are definitive of your will”. In this sense every agent, animal or human, is autonomous and self-determined. But in the second sense, to be autonomous means “to choose the principles that are definitive of your will,” the instance that Kant calls “spontaneity”. Korsgaard thinks that despite the animal nature of human agents, the quality of relationships by which a human can engage herself in external things exceeds the level in which other animals engage themselves. Responsibility can thus be seen to refer in her view to the use of one’s mental voluntary movements in actual relationships in enhancing rather than degenerating moral abilities. Such uses are, for instance, reasoning, collaboration, commitment, care, listening, deliberation, love, and mental voluntary movements.

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719 Compare to how Kantian ethics connects between the concept of autonomy and moral concepts.
720 What is left open in this interpretation, however, is the criterion for correct contribution to the way the world is in constructing one’s agency. So, what is the criterion for the right construction of the agency that carries on the process towards the ideal? What might be an appropriate procedure for actual embedded, relationally autonomous agents to approach the real moral reason of action? I shall discuss these ideas a little more in the following chapters.
721 The difference that makes moral criticism possible for humans but not animals is included only in the fact that when self-constitution takes place in human nature, principles according to which it is realised are selected by more complex processes including more influential relationships (relational operations also include mental voluntary movements). Korsgaard 2009b.
722 Korsgaard 2009b, 108.
723 See, for instance, how she explains the reason for action by making the distinction between the “primitively normative” instinctive responses to reasons for action, which even an animal experiences “as ‘called for’ by the occasion” and extraordinary perception of reasons. The latter may detach the perception from the normative significance it naturally inhabits, which is required in order to obtain a more scientific or neutral view of the world. But it is not possible because of intelligence, but because of the special interaction of intelligence with reason. Korsgaard 2009b, 110-13.
Responsibility, then, does not require “spontaneity”. If Korsgaard is right and I have interpreted her correctly, both natural and social engagements of agency, and the following, modestly evolutionary and constructivist accounts of moral autonomy are compatible with the (chastened, but basically) Kantian theory of ethics.  

3.5 QUESTIONS FOR ETHICS

3.5.1 RELATIONAL EXPLANATION AND ETHICS

Ethicists defending the relational view of agency cannot follow wholeheartedly either Kant or Hume. The key problem lies, however, in how the central concepts of their ethical systems, “rationality” or “moral senses”, should be interpreted. A theory of ethics should take complex structures into account. On the base of the given examples in the previous sections, it is justified to argue that there is plenty of evidence for the relational conceptual shift about moral agency. This kind of shift also plays a significant role in normative ethics and even in metaethics. An experimental perspective on philosophy promotes a relational conceptual shift. It was seen in the previous chapter that the shift described in this chapter has been proposed in environmental discussions by naturalists and constructivists parallelly, and through relational aspirations, these approaches have significant congruences. Constructive elements shared by naturalist and constructivist criticisms against modernist presuppositions are importantly connected with the revised explanation of moral agency. I have chosen to call it ecologically relational moral agency for the reasons explained in this chapter with the help of the introduced interdisciplinary perspectives.

The concept was developed by exploring current understandings of human nature and the mental operations relevant for moral action. I brought together pieces of discussion on philosophical anthropology, philosophy of mind and epistemology, complemented with supportive examples drawn from selected fields of empirical sciences in order to initially articulate the central elements of an ecologically relational conception of moral agency. Although the given proposals were only examples, it was discovered that moral self, cognitive operations, knowledge, rationality and even autonomy are currently widely considered to be relational issues. It also became clear that not all the constitutive relationships are of similar type (e.g. mental) but connect various elements that are, in a sense, ecologically structured with each other. The independency thesis familiar to individualistic definitions of moral agency as well as the strict dichotomy between active and passive partners of the

725 To be precise here, it is worth acknowledging that even Kant recognised some kind of relationality between substances: causality in physics is not unidirectional for the object of causation is active. He called it reciprocal causality. Kant argues, e.g. that “it is absolutely necessary that all substances in the world of phenomena, in so far as they are coexistent, stand in a relation of complete community of reciprocal action to each other”. Kant, I., & Meiklejohn, J. M. D., Critique of Pure Reason (Waiheke Island: The Floating Press 2009), 298. However, he did not refer to it when talking about the reasons for action.
Relational moral agency

Mental processes are thus widely questioned. According to relational explanations, the objects of mental operations are involved in the subject’s mind in a way that the operations are better called relational processes rather than the subject’s processes. Objects and environmental conditions are not passively external to the action. Aspirations to articulate the ecological relationality of actions in ethics resonate with these explanations.726 Empirical explanations of agency are focused currently by a wide range of scientific fields: besides biology and psychology, also neurosciences, cognitive science, anthropology, social and development psychology, sociology and fields of philosophy are involved, among others.727 This calls for interdisciplinary methods, which have not yet been much developed around this issue.

Two aspects of the current notions of moral agency are especially illuminating for this study: first, non-dualism between reasoning and intentional operations, which emphasises the relevance of materiality and bodily life as determinants of moral reasoning, and second, collaborative interrelatedness (social and ecological) at the core of operations crucial for moral agency. According to a relational notion of agency, determined and voluntary actions are intertwined in a way that makes it impossible to ignore the physical and social conditions of reasoning with regard to the reasons of action.728 Since the conditions are partly influenced by the agent’s response to them, future conditions are modified in intentional actions. An agent is partly responsible for what she can consider as the reason, and on which reasons she can, or is motivated to, act. Therefore, relational explanations of moral agency also offer certain reasons for being moral; it thus contributes to one of the basic metaethical questions, namely the normative force of moral reason: why should one be moral? Being moral is motivated because it is also a condition for an individual (1) to survive as a coherent being, (2) to know, and (3) to act rationally. For the same reason, it is motivated to interpret “being moral” in a sense that includes moral attitudes to the nonhuman world.

Reasoning considered as relational implies that actions are not just expressions of freedom made with the assistance of neutral knowledge. The quality of the relationship between an agent and an object dictates what one can extract from the object, whether it is knowledge or utility. Preceding choices direct and limit further decisions, since they rely on the relationships one has: relationships are constitutive for the moral ability of an agent and influences her future being and human identity.

726 Articulations about the active role of material nature have been made in environmental ethics before this study, for instance, in Cheney 1998, 265; Preston 2000, 240; Raz & Wallace 2003; Plumwood 2002, 46, 49, 54, 56, 206, 215-216, 227-29; Haraway 1988, 592.

727 In Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge (1998) Edward O. Wilson moves away from biological reduction to the reduction of ethics to scientific “consilience”: “The individual is seen as predisposed biologically to make certain choices. By cultural evolution some of the choices are hardened into precepts, then laws, and if the predisposition or coercion is strong enough, a belief in the command of God or the natural order of the universe.” Wilson explains ought, not as “the translation of human nature”, but something that “denotes what society first chose (or was coerced) to do, and then codified”. According to him, naturalistic fallacy just entails a naturalistic dilemma. According to his solution, “ought is the product of a material process”. This points to “an objective grasp of the origin of ethics”. Wilson 1998, 279, 280. See also Cela-Conde & Ayala 2007, 354, and Cosmides & Tooby 2013. As the popularity of arguments reducing reliable moral codes to empirical explanations has not abated in environmental discussion, they are worth being examined as a part of that discussion in this study.

728 This links the issue with discussion about moral reason (a notion referring to moral realism) on the one hand and the normative force of ethics (a notion referring to moral constructivism) on the other. For the discussion, see, e.g. FitzPatrick 2005.
One needs to ask: How do my actions influence my understanding of humanity? Who do we want to be? What drives us to our intentions and what role do I have through my everyday relationships in directing intentions? Interactivity implies that the conditions of rationality partly depend on the material relationships and ecological conditions of an agent.

Ecologically relational moral agency has also direct implications in practical environmental ethics. For example, the viewpoint changes to the efforts of the modernist approach to argue for the idea of moral status of nonhuman entities, which was seen as a weakness of environmental ethics. The moral status of individual nonhuman others analogical to human agents becomes unnecessary: moral status emerges from their collaborative partnership in agency, which as such requires each partner to be respected and recognised. As constitutive for the operations of the agency itself, physical elements are involved in the moral system. Accordingly, the axiological debate common to environmental ethics concerning the priority of values that contradicts between natural ecological values and socio-ecological values also becomes vague.

Relational notions of autonomy show that responsibility can be saved without an individualist or totally free notion of autonomy. It may be justified to spread the idea of responsibility in time to the operations by which agency is constantly constructed. For example, we owe a debt to our hunter-gatherer ancestors and their ecological environment in the savannah for many of our social instincts and moral sense. Can we thus praise or blame them for our current moral inclinations? As social structures and cultural habits do have an impact in evolutive processes, according to many evolutionary scientists, moral agency is relative to the ecological, social and cultural conditions in which it is constructed. Autonomy, therefore, may be limited due to our particular location in evolutionary time and ecological place – which include the former cultural habits and social structures. But in the line of agency construction, the “narrative of agency”, emerging from the influence of our ancestors and their environments, from contemporary social and ecological relations, and from the imagination for the future, as well as people and other creatures coming after us, may include elements of relative autonomy. By everyday choices, moral abilities can be cultivated or degenerated, autonomy included. In this sense the idea of responsibility as the responsibility for certain wider traits of behaviour, such as cultural values, and even for some physical adaptations could be compared with the idea that is called “original sin” in the Christian vocabulary. The hope to approach relatively autonomous choices is included in that the operations of agency are constructed in relation with wide enough and relatively harmonious, resilient entirety of relevant ecosystems and nets of interaction.

I have argued in this chapter that the hegemony of the common explanations of moral action, namely Galilei’s type of causal-mechanistic explanation, Aristotle’s type of teleological explanation and the modern humanist freedom of will explanation, have been challenged by new models of explanation. Despite the fact that moral

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729 Mark Coeckelbergh has already attempted to formulate a relational notion of moral status in Growing Moral Relations: Critique of Moral Status Ascription (2012).

730 For the collective autonomy thesis, see for example Copp 2007a.
actions need to be intentional, not just causal actions, relational types of explanation bring causal and intentional sides of the action closer to each other by pointing out their mutual interrelatedness.

In the light of what has been argued until now, the flaw of hardwired modernist positions can be located in their narrow conception of agency, which is partly based on a crude model of causation.731 The pieces of scientific evidence and philosophical discussions I have brought together here reinforce the fact that explanations of action that conceive of natural causalities and intention in a non-radical way and their mutual relationships as complex are possible and currently well represented. These explanations often refer to the complexity of causalities and the copresence of influences.732 This should not be excluded from the background elements of moral discussion. A plausible model of causation should take ecological structure of relationships into account. According to the environmental philosopher Anthony Weston, “[c]ausation in complex, interdependent, and evolving systems with multiple feedback loops – that is, an ‘ ecological’ conception of causation – is a far better model.”733

Claiming that material and social contingencies are not secondary but constitutive elements of moral reasoning introduces, however, questions about the metaethical implications of this conceptual shift: Does relational agency overrule the autonomy of ethics? Should moral objectivism concerning moral reasons for action be denied? In what follows, I shall argue that this is not the case, although the concepts of objectivity and moral reasoning are challenged. If a relational notion of moral agency and reasoning can be seen to imply a relational understanding of moral reason for action, the impact of relational moral agency will be interesting and have metaethical implications. Namely, besides talking about objectivist (realist) and subjectivist

731 The implications of the flaw are, for instance, those connected with the moral role of ecosystems and nonhuman environment, collective responsibilities and the timescale of rational choices. Although the crude model of causation was criticised already by Kant, it has not influenced the concept of moral agency. See, e.g. Kant, Opus Postumum (translated by E. Förster and M. Rosen, edited by E. Förster, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995), 22: 318, 421.

732 Within the limits of this study it has not been possible to enter into philosophical discussions on physicalism and the compatibilism between causality and freedom, although they are very close to what is at stake. As one example of non-reductionism about causality, constitutional physicalism, in contrast to reductionist physicalism, is an externalist model of causal explanation. It considers the brain-mind problem as part of a more encompassing brain-culture problem. The causal relationships between physical and supervenient properties are seen as the web of mutual relationships between the physical situation in a wide sense (environment, P), the state of the brain as a “local” or individual physical situation (brain, B), subjective mental state (mind, M) and the wide mental realm, which covers the cultural contents (culture, C). In this non-reductionist type of physicalism, causation can be understood at certain points as having a two-way influence. First, there are two-way influences in time in the cultural realm, since culture offers logically or semantically interconnected symbolic contents that may influence backwards in time (through cultural memory, for example). Second, there are mutual influences between the physical and mental realms, which take place, first, in the intimate relation between “brain” and “mind”, but through individual brains and minds being relationally intertwined in the wider physical and cultural contexts, the mutual causal influence gets wider. In the causal influence between brain and mind the physical influence (B→M) is temporally prior, following by mental feedback as the structuring capacity of experiential awareness, which provides causal impact (M→B). Structured relationally, the autonomy of higher-order consciousness is supported by a wider mental realm (C), which is “copresent to M as cultural memory, as presentational immediacy (C), and as anticipation of future possibilities (C)”. Gregersen 2000, 174-7.

733 “[T]he only alternative to being purely a cause is not to be purely an effect.” Weston 1996, 145.
(constructivist) theories in ethics, relational moral agency (by combining what is objective and what is subjective) may offer a third route in between.

### 3.5.2 RELATIONAL APPROACH TO JUXTAPOSITIONS

Two discussions in metaethics to which the details about the implications of relational agency may, I suppose, interestingly contribute concern the relationship between explanation and reason, and the juxtaposition between realism and relativism. Explanations of being moral should not be confused with the reasons for being moral, and explanations of moral commitments should be distinguished from morality as a conceptual system. Therefore, questions about the meaning of explanations should be posed. The claim that relational explanations are not irrelevant for ethics as a conceptual system calls for dissolving an extreme juxtaposition between explanation and reason.

Arguments for morality that reduce moral motivation to some natural contingencies, for example desires, as they do for Thomas Hobbes, are thought to explain rather than give reasons for being moral, because the normative force is external to moral reason. In Hobbes’s view, people want peace, security and freedom as moral aims, but for egoistic rather than moral reasons. According to moral internalism, moral agency requires reason of its own type that has normative force by itself. Responses to such reasons are usually considered to be voluntary acts. Relational moral agency seems to involve some explanatory features in the moral reasons so that they are partly mixed. Unlike Hobbes, I argue that the natural interdependencies of an agent imply that the whole structure of moral reasoning is tied to the attitudes one takes. Motivation thus cannot be just reduced to natural desires or facts about relational human nature.

As plausible empirical facts show, an agent cannot act rationally or autonomously without taking into account others on whom/which he relies. Therefore, the reason for a person to voluntarily take them morally into account is a kind of “mixed reason” including some natural “ingredients”. Relational reasoning and interdependence as explanations of the agent’s survival or processes of constructing moral meanings play a role in the conceptualisation of what is good and right without dictating any absolute contents for moral concepts. As facts about the function of moral agency influence in the conceptualisation of moral meanings, they are involved in the conceptual system of morality. The question then is, what kind of conceptual shifts are called for. Does the relational functioning of rationality influence the content of the moral concepts? Does it rule out the autonomy of moral reasons? If we wish to

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734 See, e.g. Nielsen 1972.
735 Nielsen 1972, 541-4.
736 In an ethical theory, what one should do enters into what one can do: if the structures of knowledge are embedded in external relationships, so too may the moral reasons. As constructed in social and ecological relations, the ability to reason morally develops and degenerates in accordance with the quality of those relationships.
737 This refers, for instance, to the conceptualisation of the equity and fairness of collaborative partners in Tomasello’s independece hypothesis. See Tomasello 2016, 150-2.
defend moral realism, the truth-aptness of moral concepts, and the measurements for the development of moral agency should be defended. How can we measure better and worse relational reasoning? What counts as progress or the cultivation of virtuous reasoning?

In environmental ethics the question is often raised whether moral realism is necessary for a plausible normative environmental ethic.\textsuperscript{738} I would rather ask what kind of realism would be both plausible and efficient for a normative environmental theory. The question thus is about definitions of realism. Environmentalists seek an ethical theory that is a) scientifically sound, b) critically potent and c) normatively committing. This seems to lead to a dilemma. On the one hand realism is preferred,\textsuperscript{739} while on the other it is constructivism that is preferred.\textsuperscript{740} It seems that the ecologically relational conception of moral agency could, through its philosophical implications, contribute to this discussion. This will form a hypothesis which is worth further examination and further questions will be posed about the contributions this conceptual shift might have in the following chapters. I argue that relational agency at least challenges the juxtaposition between reductionist and universalistic definitions of realism. Shadows of the metaethical debates of the last century remain in how moral realism is defined – against constructivism – as a view stating that the cognitive job of moral concepts is to offer plain knowledge that can be applied to action. This is not plausible if cognitive operations are relational.\textsuperscript{741} Hence, relational agency implies a redefinition of realism.

The borderline between moral realism and antirealism can be defined in terms of the autonomy of ethics. Ethics may lose its autonomy in two ways: by reduction of moral beliefs (1) to objectively verifiable natural facts, or (2) to attitudes and voluntary preferences constructed by a freely floating individual mind or by a social group. While the former leads to extreme moral objectivism in the sense of determinism, meaning that moral beliefs are self-evident as they are, say, coded in the brain by the course of evolution, the latter leads to moral relativism.

In their extreme forms both evolutionary and cultural explanations are reductionist and both naturalism and constructivism face conceptual problems concerning the autonomy of ethics. Naïve evolutionary naturalism reduces moral concepts to human psychological mechanisms explained by biological, evolutionary psychology, while hardwired constructivism reduces moral concepts to expressions of the state of mind of particular people, social structures or cultural values. As relational agency refuses reductionism, it calls for a dissolving of extreme positions in metaethics. While extreme forms of naturalism and constructivism are reductionist

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\textsuperscript{739} Realism maintains the ability of a moral theory to perform the critical task: With the current acute global problems the task of an ethical theory is to convince people that something “ought” to be done, despite the conventional moral codes – for “nature’s sake”, for instance. This is not seen to apply to relativism, which “threatens to deprive morality of its critical edge”. Jamieson 2008, 39.

\textsuperscript{740} A theory should offer plausible definitions of the good for contingent earthly beings. Efforts to understand the conditions of flourishing and the earthly limits of beings should not be undermined.

\textsuperscript{741} The juxtaposition of moral realism and antirealism sharpened during the last century. Due to the shift in empiricism, the debate with rationalism turned from that about the sources of moral concepts to debating about their contents. The influence was an increasing doubt about the possibility of “cognitive content” in moral concepts. Since then, positions have become more diverse and nuanced, showing especially the influence of Rawlsian and neo-Kantian constructivism. Korsgaard 2003, 99, 104-5.
about moral reasons, relationally modest forms of either approach represent nonreductionism. Therefore, relational agency has a potential for making a sound claim that contextual reasoning does not threaten the autonomy of ethics.

Many environmental philosophers are pleased to remark that interesting metaethical midway proposals have recently been defended. Dale Jamieson recognises among them especially “quasi-realism”, “realist-expressivism”, “internalist naturalistic moral realism”, “sensible subjectivism,” and “dispositionalism”. He claims that these “sensible center” positions share the suspicion towards both universalistic realism and modes of relativism. My supposition is that relational features in a theory are connected with metaethically hybrid shifts. Such midway initiatives attract environmental ethicists because of their potentiality to maintain both the critical force of ethics to evaluate particular moralities (approaching moral objectivism) and the ultimate particularity of all actual moral perspectives, including autonomy and motivation (approaching moral subjectivism). Relational reasoning refuses a strict division between “passive” objects of mental operations and “active” responses of the mind. Since constitutive interactions involve not only an individual’s cognitive and voluntary mental operations, but also external relationships, the conceptual clarity of starkly separating belief from expression seems to vanish. Consequently, the philosophical juxtaposition between a factual and a constructed basis for moral conduct abates. If internal and external activities are constitutively interrelated, the borderline between non-reductionist moral realism and cognitivist moral expressivism, for example, becomes blurred.

The solution found most preferable in this study would be the one that maintains both the normative authority and the autonomy of ethics. I consider that such a view can be approached with the help of relational notions of agency. The problem for constructivism from the point of view of the autonomy of ethics is how to avoid relativism and achieve agreement. If relativism is accepted, environmental (as well as social) problems should be seen as solvable practical issues in each particular situation regardless of the conditions of moral operations. In the case of naturalism, the reduction of morality to the mechanisms of nature or psyche may offer objective grounds for conduct, but only in the sense of explanatory reasons. This kind of “moral science” lacks authority as a source of “ought”. Problems with hardwired forms of naturalism and constructivism thus largely originate in reductionism. Applying ecologically relational moral agency, which is a non-reductionist notion, may soften both views in a way that reduces even the gap between the naturalist and constructivist positions in metaethics.


743 Juxtaposition between moral subjectivism and objectivism will also become blurred. Various proposals have been posed to dissolve the conflict between subjectivism and objectivism from different pointviews. See e.g. Richard Bernstein’s Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis (1983), John Rawls’s Political Liberalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) and Martha Nussbaum’s Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species, Membership (2006), and Susan Haack’s Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology (Oxford, Malden: Blackwell Publishers 1993).
4 IMPLICATIONS OF RELATIONAL MORAL AGENCY: SHIFTS BEYOND NATURALISM AND CONSTRUCTIVISM

4.1 INTRODUCTION: FROM FACTS TO PHILOSOPHY

Since scientific discussion on natural phenomena currently highlights the fundamental interactivity of natural processes, a question arises whether science can sustain the plausibility of normative ethics, if the premises concerning factual nature are defined in terms of simple causalities in the established formulations of an ethical argument. Naturalist explanations are not necessarily reductionist ones. Instead, currently the most inspiring naturalist theories are non-reductionist, such as interactive or transactive naturalism. In the philosophy of mind, concepts of the mind based on scientific evidence describe human mental operations in terms of interaction as well, and what is especially interesting in my view, in terms of interaction between the “inner” mental elements and the “external” environment. The idea of the collective mind is already established, but currently the collectives are often considered to include environmental “ingredients” or “members”. The extended mind thesis, enactivism argument and environmentalist epistemology are examples of the fields of discussion that are highly supportive for ideas of relational agency initially formulated among environmental philosophers. The connected discussions were recognised to be multiple, and only a few of them could be introduced briefly. However, scientists and philosophers have already worked in this field so that it is justified to claim that these explanatory approaches represented such a conceptual shift with regard to mental operations crucial for moral agency that interesting philosophical implications for environmental ethics and ethical theory were created.

In this chapter I shall set the relational explanations of moral agency back to the ethical discourses that had taken place in naturalist and constructivist traditions in order to find out how these explanations challenge those traditions. The purpose is to identify the main philosophical implications of the relational conceptual shift. I shall make use of naturalist and constructivist positions to which relational conceptions are not just applicable, but which already have a structure or involve elements that can be identified as relational or as supporting relationality. In section 4.2 the implications in Humean and neo-Aristotelian naturalist approaches will be examined with the help of selected discussions on neo-sentimentalism and Philip Kitcher’s evolutionary ethics, on the one hand, and virtue ethics defended by Philippa Foot, Rosalind Hursthouse and Martha Nussbaum, on the other. In section 4.3 the


implications of relational concepts will be analysed in the case of constructivist approaches, with the help of selected feminist philosophers and constructivist arguments by David Copp and Christine Korsgaard.

According to my hypothesis, agential operations located in the relationships will shift both naturalist and constructivist explanations of morality in a way that softens their hardwired interpretations and draws them closer to each other also in terms of moral philosophy. The relational notion of agency poses critical questions to each approach, encouraging them to take steps towards each other, towards mixed or modest positions. As my special interest is in the convergences of modest naturalism and chastened constructivism, I shall make use of the examples that in one way or another make compromises with the opposing perspective, naturalism with constructivism and vice versa, or seek to mix them. The purpose of this boundary-crossing analysis is to clarify and exemplify the philosophical shifts that a relational explanation might call for in each approach. A comparative method is selected, although it seems to start far from the focused issue, because the entire idea of relational moral agency has previously remained unarticulated, and clear examples of relational approaches are not available.

In this and the following chapter, the analytical method will be complemented by the constructive method in order to articulate what kind of change the relational vocabulary would make to the modestly naturalist and ecologically chastened constructivist solutions to the two most challenging metaethical questions that especially their hardwired modes face. First, can relationally shifted concepts help to explain the source of normativity (in nature or in social discourse or linguistic structures)? And if they can, does it require that naturalists and constructivists adopt features from each other’s perspectives? Second, can a relational conception of agency help naturalist and constructivist approaches to define truth conditions for agent-dependent moral concepts? And if it can, does it call them to mix each other’s points of views? According to the view that will be defended, operations of agency defined as ecologically relational – which means that even rationality and autonomy emerge from, and are tied to, the ecologically interactive structure of the very agent – offer a special explanatory force with regard to normativity, but also with regard to a relational notion of truth.

Various modes of ethical constructivism and naturalism, for instance evolutionary psychological arguments and virtue ethics, are agent-dependent theories. However, agent-dependency is usually considered either as mind-dependency or as body-dependency, but these perspectives of agency are seldom properly combined, which may arise from the view that moral reason should be a simple concept. With regard to agent-dependent truth conditions, relational agency implies that the interactions constructing the agent extend far beyond conscious minds. Whether this extension can bring about such an aspect to discursive rationality that could provide objectivism with some of its outcomes is a question worth asking. I suppose that due to ecological relationality, a plausible definition of an agent-derived truth condition for moral concepts, as well as a plausible explanation of the source of normativity, call for a position that abandons both extreme constructivism and extreme naturalism. As my supposition is that the conceptual shift in agency generates steps towards reconciling
moral naturalism and moral constructivism, possible signs about relationally procedural ethics or agent-dependent objectivity will be briefly discussed. I shall start both sections by analysing the implications of reductionist and hardwired explanations.

4.2 SHIFTS IN EVOLUTIONARY NATURALISM

4.2.1 RELEVANCE OF EVOLUTION IN ETHICS: NUANCED AND RELATIONALLY CHALLENGED EXPLANATIONS

The outcomes of chapter 3 showed that some of the basic presumptions of modern ethics concerning moral agency have empirically poor support. At first sight, this could be interpreted to support so-called evolutionary debunking arguments against normative ethics and to undermine the justifications of moral beliefs and the idea of moral realism. According to the argument of this study, this need not be the case. Instead of using the evidence to support or debunk certain metaethical positions, the evidence taken exactly as evidence concerning the operations of agency as relational operations forces us to examine more closely the presuppositions included in opposing metaethical positions. In the case of evolutionary naturalism about moral agency, the relational perspective on moral operations, will, intention, and belief, calls into question the reductionism of evolutionary explanations.

Evolutionary explanations have often been used reductively, and reductive use has led either to extreme naturalist realism, a type of moral science, or to extreme reductionist antirealism.\textsuperscript{747} Usually these extreme views adopt, however, some simplistic evolutionary explanation of agency. Ethical arguments based on naïve evolutionary psychology, for instance, require an idea of external authority to replace the autonomy of ethics. Otherwise ethics is just another scientific description. Recent evolutionary and developmental explanations focus on the relational factors of evolution. Even morality as a system has been shown to play a cooperative role in the course of evolution and the phenotype of the agent.\textsuperscript{748} I argue that in the light of current empirical evidence on the relational nature of mental operations and the meaning of collaboration for intentionality, justifications for hardwired positions appear to be undermined.

The metaethical worries connected to the evolutionary naturalist explanations of moral agency are that (1) they may threaten moral reasoning as a means to achieve other than profitable reasons of action, (2) they may threaten the autonomy of action, and thus moral responsibility, by claiming determinism, and (3) they may threaten

\textsuperscript{747} See chapter 2, section 2.3.4.
\textsuperscript{748} See, e.g. de Waal 2006, 53-5. De Waal also argues that moral codes and practical conducts influence, together with the actual manipulation of the life sphere, the constitution of the phenotypes of agents. The fundamental plasticity of natural phenotypes interweaves social, cultural, psychological and ecological influences with each other already over a short period of time.
the objectivity of moral beliefs and imply relativism by explaining moral beliefs, intuitions, and culturally reliable conducts as derived from particular contingencies. The first two concern the moral operations and capacity of the agents, while the third concerns the general question whether naturalist explanations undermine the autonomy of ethics and justify debunking arguments about ethics. The key tension between evolutionary explanations of moral agency and the possibility of ethics to guide actions concerns the tension between the freedom and nature of moral agency. The authority of ethics is usually considered to require freedom at the level of the individual agent. Because it seems to contradict evolutionary explanations of agents, the easy options are to either derive moral guidance from nature, or to argue for debunking ethics. Both such options are, however, reductionist and also suppose that moral autonomy should be reduced to the level of operations inside an individual brain. In my view, such a supposition is a simplified view of a scientifically plausible account of agency. However impossible it is to give any conclusive answer, my question here is could the adoption of another, namely ecologically relational, view open up further options.

Debunking arguments in ethics are eager to use the genealogy of morality to undermine objective justifications of moral beliefs. The natural explanation of moral agency is seen to undermine moral realism and often also cognitivism. Belief in objective moral truth is an unnecessary addition, as morality just refers to the origin of socialised behaviour in evolved genetic inclinations. But moral beliefs explained as adaptations can also be considered to be objective. According to such "moral science", morality is an output of psychological adaptations, evolved to solve the problems of social and environmental life in the societies of human ancestors. Objectivity in this basically Humean mode of naturalism is based on the shared psychological structures and moral emotions of agents; moral propositions are true or untrue, but just in the context of a particular human nature. According to such a straightforward derivation of ethics from evolutionary science, moral behaviours are, in the end, the product of human brains. Moral codes are better or worse in relation to the evolved mechanisms of the mind; therefore, they are not relativist. Objective

749 If naturalist explanations are seen to threaten moral realism, any possibility of an objective perspective or moral truth must be conceptually tied with the idea of legislative will with the authority to command. In political and everyday moral discussion, therefore, scientific explanations are often connected with religious positions about the Legislator, and the Divine Command theory of ethics, in order to prevent relativism. Richards 2000, 192. For examples of arguments against this worry, see Richards 2000, 192-4, 203; Ruse, 2001.
751 For more, see Sauer 2018; FitzPatrick 2015; Nichols 2015, 97-118.
752 Joyce 2006, 179. This holds for Darwinians, who think positively on the connection of evolution with social conducts for equality or non-violence, for instance.
conducts are found in evolved social structures. This kind of reductionist approach implies, however, a problematic computational view of the mind. Environmental ethicists are sympathetic to evolutionary ideas that offer important tools to environmental ethics, but they are antipathetic to both robust reductionist naturalism and to debunking arguments. More modest approaches are preferred.

A typical philosopher’s answer is to deny the role of scientific explanations by appealing to the idea of naturalistic fallacy. But the question remains: “despite the fact that no ought ever follows from an is, and despite the fact that the concept of the good cannot be identified with any empirical property, how should we understand the normative relevance of empirical facts in light of the empirical presuppositions of various normative commitments?” The conceptual division between normative language and explanatory language is not, however, the only way to provide an answer and, I think, not even completely plausible at least from the viewpoint of agent-derived virtue ethics. The options need not be limited to these. Relational empirical explanations of moral reasoning also imply reconsidering naturalism in ethics. The agent-derived approach to ethics allows that moral beliefs can be seen as relationally objective: as expressions of optimal relational orientation or of imagined hope for ideally inclusive relational reasoning. This proposal approaches the idea of procedural realism.

Soft versions of antirealism, such as expressivism, Simon Blackburn’s quasi-realism, and John Mackie’s error theory have been among the most adopted positions by environmentalists who identify themselves as evolutionary ethicists. According to Michael Ruse, for example, Darwinism leads to moral antirealism, but not necessarily to non-cognitivism. Error theory and quasi-realism can explain the cognitive nature of moral judgements without being entangled with realism. Mackie trusts that moral judgements are untrue (“atheistic scepticism”), while some others, evolutionary ethicist Richard Joyce, for example, are sceptical about truth-aptness altogether (“agnostic scepticism”). According to Joyce, because of the agents’ relational nature no one has the competence to evaluate the truth value of moral judgements. He claims that the denial of ontological moral realism is just what evolutionary psychology implies. Discovering relativism to be true is objectively good (sic!), because it lets people seek for sustained rules on non-moral grounds leading to practically sustainable moral behaviour.

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756 Wilson, E. O. 1998, 278. E. O. Wilson, for example, claims that the naturalistic fallacy is a fallacy itself.
757 See, for example, the perspective that Hanno Sauer takes to the debunking arguments in ethics. Sauer’s view makes it clear that empirical perspective is not irrelevant for normative rationality and metaethics. Sauer 2018, 8-9.
758 As far as I am aware, naturalist explanations for morality have been constructed on the basis of complex mental processes, but no one is established enough to be taken as the only evidence here. Therefore, I shall just use a vaguer term ‘relational conception’ here.
760 Prinz 2007, 206; Joyce 2006, 222. According to Prinz, the harms of losing moral convictions are exaggerated – if only relativism is accepted. The weakening of moral convictions would cause more harm if connected with moral absolutism.
In contrast to this, Ruse follows more directly Mackie’s scepticism and argues that belief in moral realism in fact gives the adaptational advantage to humans. Hence, belief in moral realism (whether it is true or not) is justified on an evolutionary basis.\footnote{Ruse 2004, 46-7; Ruse 1998, 101, 259; Ruse 1985, 199-201. Ruse 2010, 305-8. The question arises, of course, how to measure evolutionary advantage, since Ruse denies the progressiveness of evolution (Ruse 2010, 311-3), but this is not the place to go into further detail here.} Ruse’s interpretation of soft antirealism admits the value of objectively moral reasons: freedom and action for moral reasons are necessary for the evolution of the human mind and agency.\footnote{Ruse 1998, 253-261.} However, Ruse’s meta-theory undermines trust in any moral reasons: despite the fact that trust in truth-apt moral beliefs has been preferable in human history, belief in objective ethics is an illusion.\footnote{“Ethics is a collective illusion of the genes, put in place to make us good cooperators. Nothing more, but also nothing less.” Ruse 2004, 47; Ruse 1985, 198; See also Ruse & Wilson 1986 and Ruse 1995.} The idea that the real reason to act in accordance with moral codes is beyond ethics and is located in the “cheating mechanisms” of evolution that make us believe in reason, sounds fatalistic.\footnote{Ruse claims that this is not against freedom of will, but rather, evolution requires freedom. Ruse 1998, 259. However, this is an instrumental idea of freedom.} Noticing the illusion will then turn the course of evolution, but does it threaten the future of moral agency?\footnote{Ruse then portends the end of ethics by his own view. If we recognise “realist” ethics as a device, it does not function any more. Philosophers – like Ruse himself – are, thus, the distractions of evolution: emancipation makes people aware of the fake, and they realise that nothing binds them.} Ruse’s claim is an argument from outside of the evolutionary history of human moral agents: belief in moral reality has just been a lucky fake. But calling it lucky does not imply anything ethically: ethics is a part of explanatory theory.

Metaethical positions connected with evolutionary explanations may be softened in two ways: by not reducing moral reasons to empirical explanations, but something less, or by not adopting reductionist evolutionary explanations, but rather, conceiving explanations of practical rationality as such to include elements that rely on intentional moves. The relational view of moral agency challenges reductionism in the latter sense: moral agency cannot be reduced to any ability to promote fitness. In addition to that, relational view challenges the hardwired reduction of reason to explanation by blurring the borderline between naturalist and constructivist approaches. The reduction of morality to either natural of social/cultural explanations is rejected on the basis of the complexity of the processes by which the facts about human nature (e.g. cognitive and motivational mechanisms) evolve and develop. In order to locate natural features on an ethical map, the examinations of empirical explanations should be more nuanced than they have been.

I argue that the relational notion of agency makes a difference in the implications of empirical explanations in ethics by involving ecological others in the relational process of reasoning. At least when applied to an agent-focused approach to ethics, such reasoning can provide reasons for action. Contextual moral reasoning does not undermine modest moral realism, since the cognitive and non-cognitive elements are intertwined in reasoning. According to a scientifically plausible explanation of moral reasoning, it has emerged from natural human sociality. According to Frans de Waal, for instance, moral emotions evolve in social interactions, and both moral judgements...
Implications of relational moral agency: shifts beyond naturalism and constructivism

Social interactions are thus not external to social emotions. This also explains collective agency: through the process of internalisation “the goals of others and the needs of our community” turn out to be my own. According to de Waal, this is the basis of moral reasoning, which thus cannot be reduced to emotions rather than to the social dynamics of relationships and communities to which the agent belongs. Because these relationships are complex and include a two-way impact, “reduction” is perhaps too strong a term to use here. The idea of naturally evolved moral capacity allows one to hold morality as uniquely human, in some sense, although “it never fully transcends primate social motives”. Uniqueness relies on the nature of human natural good: it is dialogical to the extent that it is unique on earth. If operations of moral deliberation and behaviour are relational, the traditional understanding of moral reductionism is challenged. This will soften naturalistic metaethics. Moral reason and experiences resulting from a complex nexus of mutual interactions are not external to the nature of the agent. But this does not involve a reduction to physical determinants in the exact sense.

I argue that the way to protect ethical autonomy and prevent reductionism has detached moral agency from natural agency in mainstream ethics. Non-natural morality as external to human nature is then connected to agential reality through some gateway capacities, such as abstract reasoning, impartiality and free will. In the evolutionary discussion, the discontinuity thesis defended, for example, by Julian Huxley and Richard Dawkins, promotes this line of thought: if moral concepts are not reducible to (genetic) profitability, they are based on external, non-natural reality (e.g., on God’s will). Darwinian explanation offers a slightly different starting point: interactive explanations that question the reductive nature of evolution are compatible with the Darwinian continuity thesis and include the idea of the naturalness of morality. These relational evolutionary explanations (1) criticise the overplayed role of genes and highlights that epigenetic processes take place in both biological evolution and cultural development; (2) show that important evolutionary mechanisms function at the level of systems which include both individual organisms and ecological environments and (3) that interactions take primacy in the

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769 This is exemplified e.g. in Dawkins’s way to warn the reader about not confusing his term “should” with any moral meanings. Dawkins 2016, 159, 180–1. According to Dawkins, “[i]f there is a human moral to be drawn, it is that we must teach our children altruism, for we cannot expect it to be part of their biological nature.” (p. 181).
770 See Griffiths & Tabery 2013, Oyama, Griffiths & Grey (eds.) 2001, and Lema 2014. According to DST, “evolution is change in the constitution and distribution of developmental systems [...]. The organism inherits an entire developmental system, but never passes on an identical one.” Oyama 2009, 151. It is worth acknowledging that the meaning of DST divides philosophers, and it has strong critics, such as Philip Kitcher. For more, see Deane-Drummond 2014.
development. In the dynamic process of development each interactant is both altered and altering.\textsuperscript{771}

Such explanations maintain that, first, there are complex evolved moral features (empathy, responsibility, intentionality, and reason), which are features of a nexus rather than of an individual, and second, the existence and future of these features depends on the interactions between the organisms and their environments, both altering along with that interaction. Social and cultural phenomena (morality included) influence natural development, too.\textsuperscript{772} Since relational agency challenges both reduction and detachment, it calls for a more nuanced approach to ethics. It seems that reductionism in naturalist evolutionary ethics is not scientifically sustained. For environmental ethicists who prefer naturalism, such evidence against reductionism may be welcomed. A non-reductionist nuanced approach may remain, however, naturalist.

If evolution and the development of moral agency are mutually related, as systemic approaches claim, reductionism must be rejected, and moral agency must not just be associated with an individual mind. But in addition to that, factual processes, such as evolution and scientific practices, should be considered to partly result from the normative stance taken by the social community.\textsuperscript{773} This resembles the idea included in virtue theories: in order to act virtuously, an agent needs to direct her attention to others with which/whom her ability to act morally develops.\textsuperscript{774} While a reductionist conception of agency applied to moral naturalism leads either to brute (determinist) objectivism or to relativism, applying a non-reductionist explanation makes room for modest naturalist realism. Relational non-reductionism in an evolutionary explanation of morality implies, however, a chastened version of naturalism. It requires a modest philosophical attitude to factual reality in the sense that philosophical theorising should be seen to be in continuity with natural sciences.\textsuperscript{775} But ethics should not be conceived as a “moral science”. Instead, identifying moral agency in the ecological nexus requires fundamental revisions in (reductionist) moral naturalism: relational view of agency draws naturalism to the metaethical borderline and sets it next to moral realism, or to the edge of realism. At

\textsuperscript{771} Positions vary, but they contain enough congruent elements to consider them a family. Jablonka, for instance, highlights that the genetic inheritance system is one among multiple systems. Jablonka 2003, 100. Griffiths and Taber underline the epigenesis and dynamicity of natural development: “the interactants at one stage are the products of earlier stages of development”. Griffiths & Tabery 2013, 89; Oyama 1985; D. H. Ford & R. M. Lerner, Developmental Systems Theory: An Integrative Approach (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992).

\textsuperscript{772} Therefore, “environmental ethicists must avoid any conflation of human moral community with ecological relationships in the natural environment, and they must not seek to derive moral guidance directly from nature or from the promptings of natural sentiment”. Kirkman 2009, 233.

\textsuperscript{773} Oyama 1985, 15; Godfrey-Smith 2001, 284.

\textsuperscript{774} Cor van der Weele argues that DST can even be called “an ethics of attention”. Van der Weele 2001, 360. See also Weele 1999,135. She compares it with ideas of Iris Murdoch and Martha Nussbaum. “Murdoch sees the essence of moral excellence as outward attention. Clarity of vision is the normative ideal”, “[Nussbaum] writes that our moral task is to be ‘people on whom nothing is lost,’ who are ‘finely aware and richly responsible.’” See Nussbaum, Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 148.

\textsuperscript{775} Defenders of such soft naturalism usually argue that the natural sciences are required to understand the way moral abilities can be maintained and advanced. See, for example, Kitcher 2007, 171-73; De Waal 1996; 2005. This is also important for environmental ethics: in order to provide efficient solutions, environmental philosophy must be in accord with scientific evidences.
the same time, it constrains constructivist theories and draws them, from the other
direction to the same borderline: to the edge of expressivism.

For naturalism that acknowledges relational agency, moral knowledge does not
result from an inquiry-type process, but from virtue-like activities that some
philosophers call wisdom.\textsuperscript{776} This means that morality as an earthly phenomenon
always remains unready, or non-stable: even morality as a human phenomenon is an
evolving issue. Adopting relational agency may thus admit only a modest type of
realism. A conceptually crucial question concerns the source of hope for the
enhancement of morality through the self-transcendence of moral agency,\textsuperscript{777} and the
possibility of (the teleological or causal) progress of ethics.\textsuperscript{778} My supposition is that
non-reductionist naturalism which emphasises the relationality of agency, has a
potentiality to defend the relevance of the material environment in ethics: attitudes
towards material others and responses to their impulses are crucial for grasping
moral insight and developing moral identity.

Relational processes of moral reasoning highlighted by current sciences uncover
the weaknesses of extreme metaethical positions. Not surprisingly, those who
recognise the relationality of agential processes mostly prefer some midway
metaethical solution. The fact, however, is that midway or “sensible centre” theories
are often located closer to modest antirealism than realism, although I do not see any
grounds to disdain modestly realist options.\textsuperscript{779} The empirical claims to define agency
in radically relational terms advances, in fact, the plausibility of modest realism.
Fundamental relationality questions the way in which the foundations of ethics have
been located in moral realism either in nature or in reason. The complexity of mutual
interrelatedness in moral operations makes such a division irrelevant. Environmental
philosophers who wish evolutionary theorising to converge with normative reasons
for environmental actions have a notable interest in theories that build a bridge
between scientific naturalism and moral realism without falling into reductionism of
any kind. Proposals like a naturalist version of neo-sentimentalism,\textsuperscript{780} Elliot Sober’s
“contrastive empiricism,”\textsuperscript{781} and especially neo-Aristotelian naturalistic theories,
such as Philippa Foot’s, Michael Thompson’s and Martha Nussbaum’s views\textsuperscript{782} are
among the options for them.

Talking about relational agency undermines moral reasons as either objective or
subjective. Whether a midway theory of ethics is convincing or not as a relational thus
depends very much on whether the theory recognises the conceptual relativity of both
moral objectivity (that the moral concepts are external to the agent) and moral
subjectivity (that the moral concepts are internal to the agent). The idea of the
cognitive source of the moral concepts either “out there” or “in here” should be
questioned. Modest realism can take either a non-cognitivist (such as neo-
sentimentalism) or a cognitivist form (such as natural teleology). But bringing

\textsuperscript{776} E.g. Deane-Drummond 2014.
\textsuperscript{777} The term is from the environmental philosopher, John Nolt. See Nolt 2008.
\textsuperscript{778} Kitcher 2011, 209-252.
\textsuperscript{779} My focus will be more on realist options because they fit slightly better with the general
aspirations of environmental ethics.
\textsuperscript{780} McShane 2011.
\textsuperscript{781} Sober combines realism and empiricism in his theory. Sober 1994, 2, 114-35.
\textsuperscript{782} See, e.g. Foot 2001; Thompson 1995; Nussbaum 2011.
relationality into picture results in the cognitive and non-cognitive operations becoming inseparable. This leads to a revised understanding of, for example, representationalism. If the constitution of the mind is extended to the environment, neither minds operating in agency nor objects of representation can alone form the locus of representation. This leads to a revised understanding of, for example, representationalism. If the constitution of the mind is extended to the environment, neither minds operating in agency nor objects of representation can alone form the locus of representation.783

This seems to lie behind the fact that philosophical implications of relational conceptual shifts manifest themselves parallelly in modest or midway arguments concerning ethics: shifts from naturalist and constructivist directions meet here. It is the change itself, concerning the functions of moral agency (whether the change enhances or degenerates) that most matters for morality. Examples of basically naturalist approaches that compromise a solely biological tone of the genealogy of morality approach the line where naturalism and social constructivism can cross. I argue that compromising with constructivism increases the ability of evolutionary naturalism to contribute to the metaethical dilemma about how the content and normative force of moral concepts can be combined. The relational notion of agency contextualises moral reasoning, but unquestionably denies the reduction of moral concepts to either natural facts (approachable by science) or to social constructions (approachable by social interactions).

Examples that will be introduced in the following sections can be categorised in two ways: First, they adopt either a basically Humean sentimentalist theory or Aristotelian naturalism. Second, they end up with either modest metaethical realism or modest metaethical antirealism. For instance, sentimentalists Robert McShea and Katie McShane are Humean realists, while Michael Ruse holds a Humean and antirealist view, and Frans de Waal seems to defend a realist metaethical intuitionism. Philippa Foot and Philip Kitcher both defend purely naturalistic approaches, but Foot is a realist while Kitcher holds modest antirealism to be true.784

The main question for these approaches will be how the relational shift influences their theories of ethics. Despite the fact that the focus will be on loosely realist approaches, it should be acknowledged that a plausible non-reductionist naturalism cannot escape the constraints of the human species. Actual moral codes are thus never absolute, even though they can validly be said to be true in the actual situation of the world. However, it depends on one’s definition of realism whether the view counts as realism or antirealism. For most modest realists, ethics can be objective, for instance, in some procedural sense: reliable moral concepts can be constructed through enhancing the structures and functions of the moral mind (and body), not by uncovering them.

783 Enactivism conceptualises this mutual influence in a way that is helpful here. See Colombetti & Torrance 2009, 515-517. While radical enactivists argue that there is no informational content in the mind whatsoever, however, interesting openings have been made for constructing enactivist ethics by an appeal to virtue ethics. See, for example, Czech philosopher Petr Urban’s “Enactivism and Care Ethics: Merging Perspectives,” Filozofia 70(2) 2015: 119-29, and “Foregrounading the Relational Domain – Fenomenology, Enactivism and Care Ethics,” Horizon 5(1) 2016: 171-82. For radical enactivism, see Daniel Hutto & Eric Myin, Radicalizing Enactivism: Basic Minds without Content (Cambridge, London: The MIT Press 2012).

784 Foot 2001; Kitcher 2011. Antirealism is, at least, the starting point of Kitcher’s The Ethical Project (2011), although his antirealism can also be questioned. For the difference between Kitcher and Ruse, see Ruse 2010.
4.2.2 HUMEAN APPROACHES TO SOFT NATURALISM

Humean metaethics resonates with the attempts to explain the dispositions of cooperation by an appeal to the empirical sciences. However, the metaethical lines are not always clear, and also arguments for non-Humean, cognitivist Darwinian metaethics are defended. Moral sentimentalism is a favoured starting point to combine a natural explanation of morality and the normative force of moral codes. The key to the argument, moral senses, forms a stage in which the relational conceptual shift can also enter. The neo-sentimentalism defended, for example, by Robert J. McShea, Fritz Allhof and Katie McShane challenge traditional sentimentalism by mixing biological and constructive aspects of moral senses with the help of some relational notions about moral agency. They wish to defend non-reductionism and seek to bridge error theory and moral realism without employing any mind-independent moral facts. Consequently, these neo-sentimentalist approaches move towards the arena of metaethical midway positions. But constructive and innate elements are not easily combined on the theoretical level. Without a clearly formulated notion of the mechanisms relating innate and constructed elements in agency, the metaethical battle lines seem to remain.

Neo-sentimentalism is basically a non-cognitivist view but acknowledges the objective nature of values. Moral sentiments are not non-natural, but neither are they reducible to biology – or to sociology – alone. According to Robert McShea, values are based on “human species-specific feelings”, evolved in social and ecological contexts to promote appropriate relations between the members of an animal (or human) society and with other beings. Such feelings form a basis for moral judgements (albeit indirectly) as well as moral motivation. Neo-sentimentalism clearly disagrees then with hardwired evolutionary psychology. According to neo-sentimentalism, moral sentiments derivable from human nature cannot be understood without both the biological and cultural conditions in which humans can flourish. The genetic blueprint is altering all the time in response to evolution and human influence, and the basis of value judgements, hence, “moves on”. But to adequately transcend the metaethical battle lines requires a clear notion of how innate biological and constructed cultural elements emerge from the interrelated processes, and what is the role of each in their mutually influential processes and in

785 Kitcher 2007, 165.
786 Cognitivist approaches that take the recent discoveries concerning evolutionary mechanisms into account are philosophically interesting, as they challenge the traditional combination of evolutionary explanations with Humean non-cognitivism. Alternative approaches have been constructed by interpreting the complex study of evolution with the help of such philosophers as Kant, Hegel, and Aristotle. See, for example, Kirkman 2007 and 2009. About the interpretational problems of evolution in the case of ethics, see e.g. Griffiths & Grey 2001, Kitcher 2006 and 2011, 138-9, 203-4; Ruse 1998, 259; de Waal 2006.
787 As Kitcher puts it, “[s]ome capacities for emotion and some emotional reactions are apt; others are not.” He echoes here Gibbard’s non-cognitivism but refuses non-cognitivism himself. Appeals to emotional reactions do not work for evaluating progress in non-cognitivism. Kitcher 2011, 204.
788 As a political philosopher, McShea represents more straightforward sentimentalism than such environmental ethicists as McShane and Allhoff. Primatologist Frans de Waal proposes a softly sentimentalist view, too. See de Waal 2006, 56-7, 177-8.
789 McShea 1990, 25-7; 30, 46-8, 181-3, 187, 198-200, 266. For McShea, a capacity for imagination plays a central role along with feelings. See also de Waal 2006, 16, 18-20, 57, 93-96.
the emergence of moral sentiments. I argue that a conceptual notion of relational agency is of help here.

However, a neo-sentimentalist theory of value argues that the agent-bound activity of valuation is compatible with the idea of the objective nature of those values, which is in the interests of many environmentalists, especially anthropocentrists, who wish to stress the objective worth of non-human nature without detaching values from human valuation. Katie McShane argues that neo-sentimentalism helps environmental ethics in “steering a clear path between naturalistic theories that reductively eliminate normativity and non-naturalistic theories that preserve normativity.” Values are tied to the valuing process, but at the same time they do not entirely depend on valuing. While the normative status of values is based on the valuing process they result from, the content is not derivable from any particular valuing perspective concerning the valued object; intrinsic values refer to “the kinds of responses that would be appropriate from valuers.” The appropriateness of the response arises from two sources: from the merits of the valued objects and from the capacity of the subject to value. Virtuous subject responses by valuing to the property that merits it; there is no need to reduce evaluative properties to non-evaluative ones. Priority is not given to either side and, hence, neo-sentimentalism takes a type of relational position to metaethics.

Metaethically, modes of neo-sentimentalism, such as Robert McShea’s “non-reductionist human nature theory of ethics”, aspire to combine expressivism about moral language with a modestly realist theory of universal, but not with static, moral facts. For McShea, feelings are experiences of altered bodily states. Success and failure, better and worse are experiences in relation to these states and, therefore, they are not objective. But there is a universal ground for ethics in the nature of passions and their interrelationship with the intellectual operations with which they are involved. An animal that has evolutionally reached the ability to receive and process sense data uses intelligence in order to structure its environment in a way that is helpful to satisfy its feelings. But the imaginative capacities cause unhappiness and psychic disorder, because they keep us “in a continual state of incipient action”. The human feeling structure is complex: our feelings are not in harmony, nor are they derived from any “intention of evolution”.

Fritz Allhoff seeks more clearly to reconsider the idea of realism. He rebuts the criticism that grounding ethics on evolved moral sentiments would amount to nihilism: Realism is compatible with evolutionary explanations if only full-blown

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791 McShane 2011, 21.
792 McShane 2011, 17-18. The evaluative property is not as such either just a disposition that causes a response or just a property that merits a response.
793 This idea is grounded on, for example, John McDowell, *Projection and Truth in Ethics* (Lindley Lecture, University of Kansas 1987).
794 See, e.g. McShea 1990, 154-5. McShea’s position was among the first formulations that evolutionally naturalise humanist ethics without debunking realism.
795 Passions have “their physical basis in the old brain, in the hypothalamic-limbic region and some of the glands”, and they are “selected for in order to serve inclusive gene fitness”, but as experiences, feelings are not objective. However, they are “the sole motivators to action”, the satisfaction of which “is the goal of the intellectual capacities”. McShea 1990, 181-4, 187.
796 For McShea, intellectual capacities naturally entail from genetically based feelings by the process of evolution, but information – here he follows Aristotle – is objective: it does not depend on experiences.
797 McShea 1990, 198-200, 266.
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metaphysical moral realism is renounced. He criticises especially Michael Ruse for in his opinion a far too narrow view of moral realism.\textsuperscript{798} Moral facts do not need to exist independently from the epistemic subjects in order to contain truth. Allhoff takes a step towards realism that does not disdain the fundamental particularity of moral viewpoints and motivation. The ability by which moral truth could be approached does not lie in any shared feature or common agreement but in the interaction between different subjects. Allhoff’s attempt, thus, is to defend a subjectivist form of realism that locates subjectivity in social collectives or interactions instead of individuals or a divine entity.\textsuperscript{799} Subjectivist realism differs from error theory in that it does not require separate metaphysical proof for the truth of moral claims, and therefore, there is no need to conclude that the seemingly realist form is a fake, as error theory claims.\textsuperscript{800} Allhoff’s solution makes use of the social contract theory, which avoids problematic metaphysical commitments but also naïve subjectivism.\textsuperscript{801} The truth conditions included are enough to ensure that “some moral claims come out being true nonetheless”.\textsuperscript{802} From the point of view of ecologically relational agency, however, the ability of traditional social contract theory to plausibly combine the naturalist explanation of moral abilities and the truth of moral facts seems weak, because the discursive truth condition requires individualism and an agent’s ownership of the qualified properties.\textsuperscript{803} But there seems no necessity to stick to them; interesting versions of the theory may be brought about if qualifications of moral agency are relationally revised. Such a theory would question a clear division between subjectivism and objectivism.\textsuperscript{804}

\textsuperscript{798} Allhoff 2009, 99. Against Ruse’s and Joyce’s evolutionary error theory, which assumes that the evolutionary basis of moral sentiments rules out the reality of moral facts, Allhoff claims that such moral metaphysics means that moral facts are “simply woven into the very nature of the universe”. Cf. Ruse 1986 and Joyce 2000.

\textsuperscript{799} Subjectivity is his tool to criticise the idea of moral facts as mind-independent. Moral realism is usually rejected by an appeal to standard forms of subjectivism, as he nicely clarifies: Moral Realism: “\(\phi\) is wrong” = def “There exists some mind-independent moral fact such that \(\phi\) is wrong”; Simple Subjectivism: “\(\phi\) is wrong” = def “I disapprove of \(\phi\)”; Cultural Relativism: “\(\phi\) is wrong” = def “We disapprove of \(\phi\)”; Divine Command Ethics: “\(\phi\) is wrong” = def “God disapproves of \(\phi\)”. Allhoff 2009, 101.

\textsuperscript{800} For Allhoff, values, like actions of will, are not real in the metaphysical sense. But as reflected actions of will of certain (informed, rational, autonomous) kinds of agents, forming an interrelated group, they have real truth value. Allhoff 2009.

\textsuperscript{801} The social contract: “\(\phi\) is wrong” = def “\(\phi\) was (or would have been) prohibited by rules agreed upon by informed, rational, and autonomous agents”. Allhoff 2009, 102.

\textsuperscript{802} Allhoff prefers social contract ethics in its contractarian version, owing to Hobbes and defended by David Gauthier, instead of the contractualist version defended e.g. by Thomas Scanlon. He believes that the former is less metaphysically committed: it does not assume social sympathy that would prevent self-interest in the contract. Allhoff 2009, 100, 103-8. However, this can be criticised. Allhoff supposes (pp. 107-8) that if natural selection plays a role in the development of moral sentiments they should inevitably be profitable to their individual possessor. This has been scientifically proved to be questionable. See, e.g. De Waal 2005; 2006; Sober and Wilson 1998.

\textsuperscript{803} In Rawls’s version, for instance, an individual agent needs to have the exceptional feature on behalf of which the agreement of agents to approve/disapprove a judgement makes it moral. Agreed approval/disapproval of the qualified agents fundamentally differs from agreed approval/disapproval of the agents without that feature. Without this requirement a standard contractual theory would fall into cultural relativism. As such qualifications are questioned by the relational notion of agency, a Rawlsian theory seems insufficient for a relational approach.

\textsuperscript{804} If this can be identified as an aspiration of neo-sentimentalism, it may get external theoretical help from neo-Aristotelianism, e.g. Martha Nussbaum’s theory. She questions and reshapes presuppositions of contractarianism from the Aristotelian virtue perspective and focuses on the non-instrumental role of interactivity for human good and function. See, e.g. Nussbaum 2006.
Perhaps, Allhoff could go further than he does. He defines both agent-independency and agent-dependency in a way that ties them to the old battle lines: grounding ethics on either external reality or the individual will. From the relational point of view this seems unnecessary. In spite of this, Allhoff’s attempt can interestingly depict a wider dilemma: each of the alternatives to metaphysical moral realism he mentions connects the truth value of moral judgement with the subject’s voluntary actions. Implicitly, this supposes that the non-cognitivism included in subjectivism would ensure metaphysical neutrality. Sticking to such a contradiction between cognitivism and non-cognitivism seems to hinder him from reaching a sensible midway position.805 A standard borderline might possibly well be breached by focusing on the bidirectional interaction and co-development of cognitive and voluntary actions in the agent’s ecological niche.806 My supposition is that a simplistic identification of metaphysical neutrality with subjectivism can be rejected: objectivism does not necessarily require a metaphysical ground – either natural (evolved objective moral codes) or supernatural. The relational shift in the concept of agency implies that the idea of an agent-dependent truth condition exceeds traditional subjectivism. The relational structure of agency would provide alternative positions able to replace the traditional battle lines.807

Examples of approaches that appeal to recent interpretations of evolutionary science in ethics can elucidate the implications of a relational shift in agency. I refer to Michael Tomasello, Philip Kitcher and Mark Johnson, who all take in their approaches to morality some notable steps towards a relational conception of moral agency. Compared to standard evolutionary psychology, Tomasello’s explanation of morality as a phenomenon is more complex and aspires also to explain the moral reasons for action. The basis of his explanation is the relational nature of human moral identity, humans as a cooperatively rational “we”. The cognitive skills of shared intentionally, such as cooperative communication, do not provide morality directly, but “they structure the way that individuals understand their collaborative interactions and the participants in them”. 808 The key is in the cooperative concept of rationality, which helps it resist some old battle lines: also the cultural development of moral reasons is possible. Cooperative reason explains the connection between motivation as an “internal” thing, and moral reasons as “external”, socially

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805 A criticism can be based, e.g., on Simon Blackburn’s works. He argues that normativity does not require a metaphysics of morals, either in a realist or a projectivist/voluntarist form. See Blackburn 1993, 166-181 and Darlei Dall’Agnol, “Quasi-realism in moral philosophy. An interview with Simon Blackburn”, in ethic@ - An international Journal for Moral Philosophy 2002 (2):101-114. In developing his quasi-realism Blackburn happens to close representationalism and pragmatic ideas of truth. For the latter, a representational judgement simply deploys a norm of solidarity with others (he refers to Rorty). Blackburn, for his part, places himself in the middle.

806 Virtue epistemologists, such as Martha Nussbaum and Margaret Olivia Little, and relational versions of the neo-Kantian approach, adopted e.g. by Christine Korsgaard, could offer tools for Humean neo-sentimentalists to question the metaethical dichotomy. Little contributes to a conceptual relationship between belief and desire and attempts to equate virtue and moral knowledge (directed to the neo-Humean Michael Smith). See Little 2007a. Korsgaard argues for a relational constitution of agency that might connect neo-Kantianism and neo-Humeanism. See Korsgaard 2012c; 2013.

807 For instance, as connected to the contract theory, the relational structure of agency would involve taking the improvement of agency (the improvement of the epistemological, rational and autonomous aspects of agency by biological, ecological, cultural webs) as one part of the procedural agreement.

808 Tomasello 2016, 143-50. Citation, p. 150. For closer analysis, see chapter 3, section 3.4.2.
constructed and culturally changing moral codes. This connection emerges through the process of conceptualisation providing a sense of self-other equivalence.\textsuperscript{809} The relational nature of explanation makes it possible for Tomasello to argue that culturally changing moral codes are objective enough for agents to be committed to them as moral reasons. For this reason, I find his way of thought highly interesting. Linking moral reason with an evolutionary explanation is an ambitious project, but the idea could be developed even further, I suppose, by articulating a procedural value of the very processes of being related with others. The nature of moral reasons could be elucidated with an argument about the mechanisms of relationality.\textsuperscript{810}

Philip Kitcher’s genealogy of morality interprets a Darwinian explanation of ethics in a non-reductionist way. Morality is clearly continuous to animal behaviour: it has developed, and still develops, under the same mechanisms as other complex behaviour traits.\textsuperscript{811} Normative guidance has evolved naturally through hominin social life: we have an evolved “capacity for articulating rules […] to shape our wishes, plans, and intentions, so that the frequency with which the altruistic tendencies that underlie cooperation are overridden is diminished.”\textsuperscript{812} Limited altruistic tendencies of human ancestors – perhaps similar to those that now exist in chimpanzee and bonobo societies – enabled a fragile social life that developed step by step into more regulative patterns, rules and complex moral lives.\textsuperscript{813} This means that the motivation for normative commitment is naturally explainable, but the content of norms is not reducible to evolutionary facts. The psychological altruism that commits people to act for moral reasons is explained without (at least the usual type of) ethical reductionism.\textsuperscript{814} An inclination to articulate rules and to commit oneself to them is a feature that constitutes one’s moral identity. But normatively articulated principles that generate moral identity are not themselves reducible to the natural well-being of those whose identity is in question.\textsuperscript{815} In spite of its overwhelming naturalism,
Kitcher’s view is thus non-reductive: moral systems are connected with future conducts.\textsuperscript{816}

In Kitcher’s view, evolutionary history opens up a historical perspective on metaethics. It explains the project that gave humans the capacity for moral agency.\textsuperscript{817} As an evolved capacity, normative guidance is contrary to cognitivism, or at least representationalism, and objectivism, or at least, cognitivist objectivism. The criterion for the success of these moral practices that developed humans’ abilities to engage with each other is that they improve social cohesion and the ability to promote such cohesion by the transmission of the normative system itself.\textsuperscript{818} However, normative guidance does not only serve “the evolutionary function of promoting social cohesion”, as it is not just “a preemptive surrogate from grooming”.\textsuperscript{819} Instead, Kitcher makes an effort to argue for expressivist pragmatic naturalism that could save the idea of an objectively better and worse course of ethical development. The idea of progress is conspicuous in his view: morality does not evolve in any direction whatsoever.\textsuperscript{820} The ethical project has not stopped, according to Kitcher, but rather, it is our ethical task “to decide how to go on” with that project: engagement in the ethical project makes us who we shall be, but the development also has a direction.\textsuperscript{821}

Despite the fact that Kitcher’s view seems to implicate objectivism, he in fact denies both objectivism and relativism: the steps taken in moral evolution are neither random nor determinate moves towards objective truth.\textsuperscript{822} Truth is not required in order to have progress or the idea that something is “objectively better than” something else.\textsuperscript{823} However, the question of objectivity with regard to progress remains. Kitcher does not deny that some point of evaluation – fixed or unstable – is needed in order to talk about progress and regress. The relation between progress and truth is thus complicated in Kitcher’s view: the forms of morality that follow each other in the history of ethics are not merely changes. Progress is the creation of ever more effective moral codes to solve the underlying problems of social conflicts and to enhance social cohesion by mutual engagement, through which psychological altruistic dispositions are amplified and extended.\textsuperscript{824}

\textsuperscript{816} Moral development is “a way of extending […] our psychological altruism […] that made genuine human life (the social life that transcended the interactions of chimpanzees) possible”. Kitcher 2007, 180. Ethics is a permanently unfinished phenomenon.

\textsuperscript{817} Kitcher 2007, 178. Tomasello agrees but explains in a more nuanced way the role of the overall development of the human species in the emergence of a specific moral system. See Tomasello 2016, 150-2. “Human morality is the way that humans have come to interact with one another in the context of certain cognitive insights about how the world, including plural agency, works.” (p. 152).

\textsuperscript{818} Kitcher 2007, 175-178; Kitcher 2011, 201-208.

\textsuperscript{819} Otherwise ethics would lose its critical authority and be restricted to maintaining social structures once considered functional. Transitions or extensions of ethical systems would not have occurred. One example concerns moral attitudes to slavery. Kitcher 2007, 172-175; Kitcher 2011, 138-170.

\textsuperscript{820} Kitcher 2011, 203-204, 209-213, 391-5, 409; Kitcher 2013. Since progress supposes a normative \textit{telos} and concern for at least the minimal or ideal truth-aptness of moral concepts, this is the point that receives most criticism in Kitcher’s theory.

\textsuperscript{821} Kitcher 2011, 173-206, 209-213.

\textsuperscript{822} Kitcher 2011, 138-9. The question “can we account for moral objectivity” is reduced to “can we make sense of moral progress”. Kitcher 2007, 176-7.

\textsuperscript{823} Kitcher 2011, 210, 246.

\textsuperscript{824} Kitcher 2007, 178; 2011, 223, 339-42. This is comparable with the idea of practical reason, relying on some idea of function as the measure of valid moral progress.
Truth-aptness is thus not bound to representation, but to the potentiality to progressively enhance social cohesion via the amplification of altruistic dispositions. Kitcher’s view of truth is a modest one and it seems to allow ethical naturalism to employ a plurality of practical truths. The truth is constantly reconstructed in ways that are very natural. Although he claims that “ethical statements are, properly speaking, neither true or false”, he disagrees with those non-cognitivists who reject the external constraints of ethics when rejecting the notion of ethical truth: “Some capacities for emotion and some emotional reactions are apt; others are not.” This kind of functional truth embodies neither standard cognitivism nor standard non-cognitivism. Appointing social cohesion as the human good parallels, however, the position of cognivist neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics.

Just as Philippa Foot, Thomas Hurka and Michael Thompson make a link between moral precepts and natural facts by referring to certain human functionings, Kitcher too focuses on the psychological capacities that are essential for our social animality. This implies a somewhat relational idea of human functioning and possibilities. Hence, the point that “represents” good and works as a criterion of progress is either the flourishing of social animality (that makes us humans now and in the future), or the amplification of those altruistic dispositions that made us social animals. Kitcher places trust in the truth that diversity and plurality are required for the process that makes us human. Ethical codes can be called truths as they “enter and remain in the ethical codes” throughout a progressive sequence of ethical practices. The core of the evaluative criterion in Kitcher’s view is in the attitudinal positioning of oneself as part of a group (or web) called “social animals”, although it does not have a permanent description. This positioning is the correct understanding of altruism, which is the core of human’s “social animality”. The ability to remedy altruism failures works then as a meta-criterion for truths providing progress.

From the viewpoint of this study, Kitcher’s view of moral truth is interesting for two reasons. First, it locates the fixed point in the correct way of being related with...
others in social animality. The idea of progress via the enhancement of mutual commitment echoes the relational idea of moral agency – and shares, interestingly, with some ecofeminist aspirations. In Kitcher’s view, the fact that the ethical project – moral reason included – is totally bound to what is, does not rule out the authority of ethics. The requirements of authority are, however, often misunderstood: authority can be based on the joint capacity to reflect on the ethical project. Truth and the authority of ethics are social by nature. Second, the “fixed point” is better defined as an ability rather than a property. Turning the focus to the methods allows Kitcher to conceive moral rationality as not requiring propositional definitions of the ideal conditions of reasoning. A fundamental issue that limits Kitcher’s view is the supposition about ethics as a human issue in a narrow sense. Human superiority remains in the link between progress and the social cohesion marking the fitness of just one species – despite the fact that this is not a necessary conclusion. While the difference between the ‘lower’ and ‘higher’ stages of the project has to do, first of all, with the quality of relations, Kitcher does not extend these relations to include non-human members of the ecological nexus. A wider “social” cohesion would also require moral codes that represent the amplification of altruistic dispositions to ensure the quality of these relations.

Kitcher’s metaethical position is not easy to locate, as it wishes to revise categories. He aspires beyond anti-realistic eliminativism (such as John Mackie’s error theory) and reductionist realism, which both fail to take the human framework of ethics seriously. They both accept the claim that in order to be real, moral facts must be objects of some scientific-like investigation.
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approach to metaethics in general: true moral concepts are expected to be exact and
cognitive in a universal sense.\footnote{Identifying naturalistic ethics as a science – as do
straightforward evolutionary psychologists\footnote{See, for example, Marc Hauser, *Moral Minds: The Nature of Right and Wrong* (New York,
London, Toronto, Sydney: Harper Perennial), 420-26.} dismisses the relational aspect of
morality, and accordingly, particularity and the meaning of commitments and
interaction are ruled out from hardwired naturalistic moral realisms. However, the
distinction between the naturalistic and the constructivist or pragmatic approaches
need not be so strict. As we have seen, focusing on the relational features of agency
means renouncing outdated scientific language when adopting a naturalist position.
A relational view thus also questions the necessity of antirealist tone in the basically
Humean positions.

Kitcher is not alone in approaching ethical understanding from a human
perspective. On the contrary, projects to combine the idea of ethics with empirical
explanations of the human mind form a major line in recent discussions. Another
important participant worth mentioning is Mark Johnson, who argues for an
“empirically responsible account of a morality that is fit for humans as we currently
know them”\footnote{Johnson 2014, 192. Johnson’s *Morality for Humans: Ethical Understanding from the
Perspective of Cognitive Science* (2014) is worth noticing here because of the impact his earlier works
have had on the rise of a relational understanding of reasoning and for the view called enactivism. In *The
Body in Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (1987) he argued that bodily
experiences generate general cognitive structures, which he calls kinetic image schemas. These schemas
can be projected to give structure to different domains of cognitive issues. See also Varela et al. 1991, 177.}
Like Kitcher, he considers ethical thinking as a problem-solving
activity in which the sources of values are various: biology, interpersonal relations,
conditions of cooperation, as well as individual and group flourishing. But what is
important, and also common for many approaches taking part in this discussion, is
that the role of cognitive contents (the results of intelligence and science), such as
empirical knowledge, is not just instrumental – as it is in the modernist counterparts.
Instead, all types of knowledge contribute to the intelligence and effectiveness of
moral ability by informing us in many ways about who we are, where we come from
biologically and culturally, and why we value what we actually value.\footnote{Johnson 2014, 192-3.}

Johnson’s project is to explain the objective reasonableness of cognitive moral
codes by empirically explainable processes. His key idea is the process of imaginative
moral deliberation. Two types of processes have been commonly identified in moral
cognition by recent empirical approaches to the mind: fast, affect-based intuitive and
non-reflective evaluative processes based on coding in the mind throughout evolution
on the one hand, and slow, conscious and reflective types of reasoning on the other.
In addition, according to Johnson, there is a third type of process of moral cognition:
due to the ability of the imagination we can imaginatively rehearse the potential
courses of our actions and determine which of them can best resolve the tensions
between interests and values. In spite of involving emotions, imaginative reasoning,
as he calls it, includes reflective, exploratory and critical processes, too. Johnson thus
describes moral deliberation as “a process of assessment of the adequacy of various
imagined courses of action for reconstructing our problematic situation into a more

\footnote{Cf. the Wittgensteinian idea of transcendental truth that led pragmatists to use language derived
from aesthetics and literature, for example. See Pihlström 2005, 71, 109-27.}
fluid, harmonious, and fulfilled reality”. What makes the assessment reasonable is an outcome of imaginative deliberation rather than some pre-given standard. Johnson’s conclusion does not abandon the idea that in each case, certain standards are objectively more reasonable than some others. He only abandons the notion that absolute standards of governance should be provided. Moral philosophy should not be seen as a project defined in terms of absolute standards. Johnson’s view thus connects reasonableness (that can here be seen as a standard for good in a somewhat objective sense) with some cognitive reasons about actual relationships and the ways they are encountered. Compared to Kitcher, whose project is grounded more clearly on the moral senses in the Humean sense, Johnson does not understate the cognitive aspect of ethical evaluation. Despite the differences, both of these participants in the recent discussion based on the empirical science of mind try to approach the issue of moral reasons from a relational point of view. This takes them half-way, but not to the point that could be called realism in a traditional sense.

4.2.3 NEO-ARISTOTELIAN APPROACHES TO SOFT NATURALISM

The neo-Aristotelian approach offers a strictly non-Humean alternative to those favouring a naturalist framework for earthly, agent-based ethics. I argue that ethical theories grounded basically on the Aristotelian tradition but open to constructionist discourse, such as many forms of virtue and care ethics, imply a certain idea of relational agency, and thus, they can be seen to represent at least to some extent, relational ethics. At least they seem compatible with a relational notion of moral agency. But I also argue that the relational approach included in virtue and care ethics is partial in the sense that it does not take properly into account the material, ecological transitive relationships essential for moral agency. Virtue ethics, especially when it approaches constructivism – as well as constructivist ethics when it approaches virtue ethics – are thus fruitful to examine as partial examples of the implications of the relational conception of moral agency. In addition, they can be used as grounds to test what an ecologically widened relationality would imply.

As an agent-based normative theory, neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics builds on a conception of human nature, but the included natural foundation of the virtues is notably non-reductionist. The step from the Aristotelian to the neo-Aristotelian approach most often takes the path of criticism of the essentialism of Aristotelian approaches and the pre-Darwinian natural sciences. Concepts concerning the nature of an organism (also used normatively in naturalism), such as ‘natural good’ or ‘function’ do not refer to any fixed or sole definition of individual, genetic or social

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846 Ibid.
847 Johnson 2014, 194.
848 The proponents of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism, listed by one among them, Rosalind Hursthouse, are: Philippa Foot, Peter Geach, Rosalind Hursthouse, John McDowell, Alistair MacIntyre, Martha Nussbaum, and Michael Thompson, plus Elizabeth Anscombe because of her strong influence on the others. Hursthouse 2013a, 3571. Despite the fact that I am highly interested in the variants of the view, the limits of this study force me to only make some initial references to some of them. The focus is on Foot and Nussbaum, as they differ in a relevant respect from each other.
success, either directly or indirectly. Morality belongs first and foremost to practical rationality. Human nature and the contingent conditions of agency are integral for morally relevant notions of good. Agency requires both human animality and rationality.

According to a standard Aristotelian claim, “[the] virtues arise in us (i) neither by nature nor (ii) contrary to nature, but (iii) nature gives us the capacity to acquire them and completion comes through habituation”. This twofold sensitivity has produced criticism targeted both against its “earthliness” (especially human animality) and against its pre-Darwinian naturalism (the “improper” earthliness of human animality). Unlike classical Aristotelianism, however, non-reductionist neo-Aristotelian ethics derives moral concepts from the agent without reducing them to any essentialist nature of the subject agents. Agent-based virtue ethics is thus very compatible with the Darwinian evolutionary notion of humanness. But at the same time, the question about earthliness or natural goodness proves to be vaguer than in traditional Aristotelian virtue ethics.

Certain forms of neo-Aristotelianism, such as Martha Nussbaum’s capabilities approach and care ethics can in fact be seen to represent certain kinds of relational ethics. As representatives of non-reductionist naturalism both neo-Aristotelianism and care ethics are notably open for a relational definition of agency and the derived normative notions. They are thus promising as frameworks for adopting the relational shift concerning moral agency (and included elements like autonomy, cognition and intention), which is, as has been shown, heavily called for by many recent scientific approaches to mind and cognition – most notably by the transactionalist types of naturalism, often called enactivism. The relational conceptual shift concerning moral rationality is strongly craved for by both relational, or enactivist, types of naturalism and by care ethics, which counts as constructivism. Parallelly, through different trajectories, they claim that care of the environment is necessary, not just for life or for our values to be realised, but for the very existence of moral agency and reason.

As a non-reductionist empirical theory of cognitive skills and agency, enactivism can be seen to support care ethics in the sense that the only reasonable attitude to the environment is that of care. Therefore, I would say, naturalism interpreted in a transactionalist, enactivist way maintains and supports the rationality of care ethics. See Urban 2015. This strongly supports the main argument of this study.

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849 According to Simon Blackburn, “the function of a feature of an organism is frequently defined as that role it plays which has been responsible for its genetic success and evolution”. Blackburn 1994, 149-50. About refusals of this definition, see Foot 2001, 32; Kitcher 2011, 218-220.
850 Foot 2001, 9. Some approaches, however, conceive moral reasons as only partly belonging to practical rationality.
851 Hursthouse 2012, 180.
852 For an introduction to the four main types of criticism and their responses, see Hursthouse 2012. Christopher Gowans criticises especially Foot and Hursthouse. See Gowans 2008, 28.
853 Kantian ethics is more seriously challenged by the Darwinian evolutionary notion of humanness. For the discussion on Darwinian humanism for environmental philosophy, see Kirkman 2009.
854 I take care ethics to be in the relevant sense relative to Nussbaum’s type of neo-Aristotelianism despite the fact that it partly relies on a Humean type of sentimentalism rather than an Aristotelian and makes use of feminist constructionism.
855 The Czech philosopher Petr Urban supports this view. He argues for a relational ethics as a modification of care ethics. See, Urban 2016. According to Urban, enactivism and care ethics offer parallel powerful criticism against the individualistic, rationalistic notions of cognition and agency, and call for a relational revision of them. Enactivism, which is a transactionalist, non-reductive interpretation of naturalist agency and cognitive skills, implies that the only reasonable attitude to the environment is that of care. Therefore, I would say, naturalism interpreted in a transactionalist, enactivist way maintains and supports the rationality of care ethics. See Urban 2015. This strongly supports the main argument of this study.
environment, from the point of view of the function of the mind, is that of care. Therefore, I argue, naturalism interpreted in a transactionalist, enactivist way maintains and supports the rationality of care ethics. My strong supposition is that the explicit articulation of relational agency and its derived implications in ethics would prove to be helpful for both environmental virtue ethics and care ethics when facing criticisms concerning their versions of naturalism and its normativity.

The idea of ecological relationality, however, provides some challenges to standard virtue ethical traditions. I have especially two challenges in mind: one concerning the definition of human functioning, as it does not take into account the meaning of ecological relations for the human function, and another concerning the relation between natural goodness (good for) and the normative good (final good), which is often seen straightforwardly. Both the question of the human function and the source of normativity in naturalism are common targets of criticism against naturalism. I argue that taking the ecological aspect of relational agency clearly into consideration can improve the relevance of the neo-Aristotelian framework in both normative and metaethical discussions. For example, Nussbaum’s capability approach is in my view open to the inclusion of the environmental well-being of the agents to the list of capabilities.

Philippa Foot’s natural teleology is often noted as an example of hard naturalism. It basically follows the Aristotelian idea that virtues and vices are character traits that either promote or impede the proper function of an organism, but two features deserve special attention. First, in Foot’s theory, the function of an organism refers to an organism defined in terms of the modern biological notion of an organism rather than any essentialist conception. An organism, such as a human being, is not considered to be a permanent species, but to be a biologically and socially constructed unity that has some functions of its own. Organism as a concept thus refers heavily to the context and to the constitutive relationships in which its function takes place. Second, the proper function of an organism, which represents the measure of a good direction in Foot’s natural teleology, is a contextual concept and relies on the human organism. A function is evaluable only in relation to the ecological and collective context in which the human organism practises its virtues. According to Foot’s natural teleology, virtues promote human flourishing, comparable with the flourishing of other organisms. Vices are natural defects that impair flourishing. But moral virtue is not reducible to human happiness.

Modern natural science undermines any large-scale teleology (like the welfare-based functionality of a species), but it leaves open the idea of small-scale teleology in the sense of the functionality of an organism, such as found in Foot’s theory. The idea is thus compatible with current scientific understanding. The proper function of the heart is to pump blood, and this occurs in order to circulate the blood, which again is explained by its function of distributing nutrients and removing waste. But is this enough for an ethical theory?

857 Foot 2001, 5, 31-2. In this sense, moral evaluations of human actions and intentions “share a conceptual structure with evaluations of characteristics and operations of other living things” (p 5).
The question arises, then, how a basically Aristotelian theory can renounce essentialism without losing the critical role of ethics while closely connecting ‘moral’ with ‘prudential’. What is the criterion to contrast internally good narratives? This is an issue of continuous debate, to which discussion about relational moral agency also contributes. Natural teleology provides a case for metaethics that follows Aristotelian teleology without adopting its metaphysical burden, if only its non-metaphysical final human good (the basis of telos) satisfies for a proper explanation of function. Foot attempts to describe human good as something that is conceptually natural but cannot be described by “success in the life cycle of development, self-maintenance, and reproduction”.

Two meanings of function can be distinguished: ‘function’ as an adaptation that is responsible for evolutionary profitability and genetic success and ‘function’ as a narrative concept, something that “has a certain place in the life of the individuals that belong to that species at a certain time”. As a narrative concept human function is partly contextual in regard to both internal purposes and external place. Foot’s natural-teleological description of a non-human being refers to its purposive actions (although it is not claimed that individual members of a non-human species have purposes). In relation to the purposes, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ (good-for, bad-for) can be used to evaluate characteristics and operations of a non-human being. Perhaps even natural “norms” are derived from such a good. But the idea of human good in the sense of a ‘final good’ is deeply problematic. If the concept of ‘function’ is restricted to the context of the fitness of genetic germ lines, connecting teleological normativity to explanations of fitness would require an additional supposition of, say, intelligent design or a benevolent creator.

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858 Foot defends the prudential nature of morality. Foot 2001, 68.
859 Katie McShane puts the problem clearly from the viewpoint of environmental ethics: How could a proper value theory for environmental values be constructed on the basis of a narrative notion of value that serves as the criterion for the good in neo-Aristotelian ethics? See McShane 2012.
860 According to Hursthouse, neo-Aristotelian naturalists “regard ethics as ‘autonomous,’ in the sense that they do not think moral judgments can be explained and justified in terms external to ethics. However, this is not because they think that moral judgments are, obviously, normative or evaluative, whereas no judgments in any of the fact-stating biological sciences could be; rather, they all hold that there are facts which are both evaluative and natural, moral facts being amongst them, and hence reject both supernaturalism and moral anti-realism or non-cognitivism.” Hursthouse 2013a, 3571.
861 However, “different from good in the world of plants and animals”, human good follows, at the same time, a “conceptual structure [...]. For there is a ‘natural-history story’ about how humans achieve this good as there is about how plants and animals achieve theirs.” Foot 2001, 51.
862 Foot 2001, 32. Foot adopts the concept of function from Michael Thompson. In the case of human life, teleological propositions refer to a different kind of function than in the case of non-human life.
864 For example, the requirement of night vision for owls or co-operative hunting for wolfs are natural norms. They are partly derived from general features (reproduction, nourishment, life, death), but partly from particular, local, less general ideas (eating, fruiting, fleeing). Foot 2001, 33-6.
865 Foot 2001, 43.
866 See the criticism by, for instance, William FitzPatrick. According to him, “a welfare-based conception of natural functions and ends is problematic. Suppose [...] that an organism’s teleological profile is indeed shaped by the facts of the evolutionary history that ultimately explain how it was put together as the organized functional system it is. In that case, organisms will be teleologically organized ultimately and generally toward the end (roughly) of passing along germ-line copies of their genes as well as or better than rival conspecifics (this being the unifying effect non-incidentally promoted by all of the organism’s proper-functional traits) – rather than toward the end of flourishing as such in any richer, intuitive sense. Since this has little to do with what we would think of as ultimately and generally relevant to ethical normativity when applied to the human case, it seems doubtful that the normative
Whether natural teleology survives as an appropriate framework for adopting the notion of a relational agent depends on its ability to define the meaning of human function (and hence, the basis of telos) in a valid way. Foot argues, in line with both Aristotle and John McDowell, that 'happiness' includes virtuous life; happiness is “the enjoyment of good things”. But she denies McDowell’s identification of happiness with the life of virtue, which would involve that virtuous actions never diminish human happiness. Instead, Foot combines virtuousness with natural flourishing without supposing that they can be equated. The virtue (good-at) of an individual does not entail his/her flourishing (good-for); a genuine tragedy may be included in a moral choice. Norms are thus not reducible to happiness, but the logic of how moral norms emerge from human good parallels how natural norms emerge from natural features of plants and animals. Against the common philosophical tendency to make a division between “good persons” and “good human beings” (which lifts moral agents above their social animality), Foot argues, together with another neo-Aristotelian, Rosalind Hursthouse, that moral evaluation does not require any transcendental ability. A modern critic may, hence, pose the question what needs to be added to the concept of flourishing in order to determine the criterion for virtuousness. My suggestion is to focus on the relational nature of these concepts.

While the usual problem for virtue theories is that focusing on flourishing, for instance, easily slides back to essentialism or to standard neo-Aristotelian idea of good narratives as the criterion for virtuousness, projects that pursue beyond these ordinary solutions usually take steps towards constructivism. Foot’s answer, for example, is interesting, but the problem is that it remains individualistic. Therefore, I suppose, she is close to assimilating two different goods, evaluative good (good-at) and final good (good-for), which would be confusing. But as she does not actually

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framework provided by natural teleology can be of any help in thinking about the normative framework of ethics.” FitzPatrick 2008.

867 It is not my task here to evaluate whether Foot’s argument succeeds, but the attempt as such seems justified from the point of view of relational agency: to describe human good “as different from good in the world of plants and animals, where good consisted in success in the life cycle of development, self-maintenance, and reproduction”, but at the same time as following the same “conceptual structure”. “For there is a ‘natural-history story’ about how human beings achieve this good as there is about how plants and animals achieve theirs.” Foot 2001, 51.

868 Like John McDowell, Foot thinks that “there is indeed a kind of happiness that only goodness can achieve,” but unlike McDowell she argues that in a moral choice “the genuine tragedy” may remain. Virtue as such does not entail happiness, but happiness is the enjoyment of good things. We need to add – as Foot does with David Wiggins – that “a good person must not only see his or her good as bound up with goodness of desire and action, but also feel that it is, that is, with sentiments such as pleasure, pride, and honour”. Foot 2001, 97-8. See David Wiggins, "Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle’s Ethics: A Reply to John McDowell,” in R. Heinaman (ed.), Aristotle and Moral Realism (London: UCL Press, 1995): 219-31.

869 Evolutionary biology denies any definition of functions by the overall flourishing or welfare of individuals, and hence, the concept of function used in natural teleology is questionable. See, Kitcher 2011, but also a critic, FitzPatrick 2008. Philippa Foot is deeply aware of this problem and seeks to avoid it, but still, Philip Kitcher criticises her about remaining too close to Aristotelian.

871 Christine Korsgaard’s neo-Kantian theory deals with the similar problem of relating evaluative good and final good and, thus, deals with the issue of relating virtue with the nature of an agent. They approach the same question from different perspectives. They agree on some issues but Korsgaard also criticises Foot: “Aristotle is confident that the properties that make us good-at being human, which he identifies with the virtues, will also be the properties that somehow constitute or guarantee our good. Some latter-day virtue ethicists are also tempted by that thought. But that conclusion cannot be earned simply by assimilating good-for in the final sense into good-for (or good-at) in the evaluative sense.
make this assimilation, her Aristotelian view seems to be lacking something. The adoption of ecological relationality could facilitate the reconciliation of flourishing and virtuousness.

According to one of the most usual criticisms, neo-Aristotelian naturalism is not compatible with the scientifically plausible, evolutionary conception of human nature.872 It is argued that evolutionary biology renounces any idea of human beings as possessing intrinsic properties as essentialist. Although this criticism can be bypassed as problematic,873 nuanced counterarguments have also been constructed. For example, Richard Samuels proposes that traditional essentialism should be replaced by a “causal essentialist” view, according to which properties and regularities associated with humanity are to be explained by human nature as “a suite of mechanisms, processes, and structures”.874 This resembles some aspects of relational agency considered to be the functioning of ecological, structural and interactive human nature. Another counterargument, which also resembles the idea of relational humanity, claims that a “restless drive to reach forward to something more” is fundamental to human nature. John Cottingham, a defender of this idea, argues that the constitution of human integrity requires an experience of something transcendent, notwithstanding the existence of any transcendental object. Most obviously, experiences of moral concepts are like this as they can be constitutive for human nature without reductionism.875

4.2.4 RELATIONAL SHIFTS IN VIRTUE ETHICS

The plausibility of neo-Aristotelian naturalism could be improved, I think, by scrutinising the possibilities of a relational reading of its approach to human nature. Three aspects are included here. First, turning the focus from the features of human species to the organic development and structure of human functioning would be scientifically plausible and help in redefining the relationship between the function and the virtue. Second, highlighting the fact that human beings are social animals who are essentially bound to ecological conditions would uncover the non-individual nature of agency: mutual influence of intertwined partners and the support of a collective could even be seen as requirements for human moral agency.876 Third, the relationality of agency also implies that the inquiry into human nature, which is used to evaluate valuable human functioning, is an ongoing process; its success depends on practical virtuousness of the epistemic agents. According to Aristotelian

without further ado. As Foot herself insists, ‘It is too quick to say that because human goodness belongs to those who have the virtues, human good is what they will attain in acting well.’ Korsgaard 2013, 16. Korsgaard argues that Foot’s theory is not enough to resist essentialism. Korsgaard 2012a, 9-10. See also Korsgaard 2008, “Aristotle’s Function Argument,” in The Constitution of Agency. For her own view, see section 4.5 and chapter 5.


873 Rosalind Hursthouse, for instance, argues that this criticism is based on an incorrect understanding of Aristotle, a narrow conception of evolutionary biology, and claims about human nature that would make any ethical theory problematic, not just virtue ethics. Hursthouse 2012, 170-188.


876 See Hursthouse 2013a, 3575-77.
conception of practical science, action and understanding are mutually connected: the more aware of her own nature a human is, the more she can, again, practise virtues. In order to make use of these features to the full, explicit articulation of the non-individual, relational nature of the agent and her virtue would be helpful. It should be noticed that such a suggestion is actually not far from the aspiration of neo-Aristotelian and other virtue approaches. Unfortunately, philosophers often end the discussion before this point – or exclude the ecological side of relationality. But there are also some encouraging exceptions to this trend.

One of them is Martha Nussbaum’s capabilities approach, which aspires somewhat further. Nussbaum’s contribution to Aristotelianism draws from the contractarian theory of ethics and represents non-reductionist naturalism. The capabilities approach, originally developed together with Amartya Sen, is generally counted among the most prominent frameworks for pursuing theories about environmentally, socially and economically sustainable society at the present time. However, it has some difficulties in taking ecological aspects into account in the concept of a virtuous life. Nussbaum has developed her metaethical justification of neo-Aristotelian naturalism by drawing it closer to ethical constructivism, especially Rawls’s theory of justice, which, perhaps, impedes withdrawing Nussbaum’s view from restrictive individualism. Nussbaum’s version of the capabilities approach is naturalistic in the neo-Aristotelian sense, but the development she has made draws it onto the platform of midway positions in metaethics: naturalism is compromised with constructivism more than in other neo-Aristotelian views. In this sense, I think, it is especially interesting as an optional framework to apply the relational notion of moral agency and to improve the grounds for an ethical theory appropriate for ecologically relational human agents.

Nussbaum ties her conceptions of human good to the basic human capabilities to live a life that is worthy of the dignity of human beings, “a life that has available in it ‘truly human functioning’”. Her attempt is to justify the list of basic human capabilities as entitlements of all citizens in a society, and as important for everybody. Put briefly, the ten central human capabilities are: (1) life, (2) bodily health, (3) bodily integrity, (4) senses, imagination, and thought (which includes “being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason – and to do these things in a ‘truly human’ way”), (5) emotions (which includes “being able to have attachments to things and people

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877 Despite the fact that there are also other interesting exceptions, especially among non-Aristotelian virtue theorists, I find Nussbaum’s view clear and interestingly comparable with a neo-Kantian approach aspiring to a somewhat shared aim. A kind of neo-Kantian counterpart to the neo-Aristotelian view will be exemplified by Christine Korsgaard’s project. According to Korsgaard, the Aristotelian view should be complemented with the neo-Kantian approach to value, “which makes all values relative to [...] our valuing capacities”. Korsgaard 2012a, 10. Even as a Kantian view, Korsgaard aspires for scientific plausibility with regard to the best evidences of the evolutionary origins of morality.

878 However, as Nussbaum’s theory does not talk about the physical or ecological systems as partners of interaction, it is unlikely that it can directly provide an option for a relational approach to ethics. See Nussbaum 2014, 3. But as a step towards a relationally revised Aristotelianism, the theory of capabilities may offer a parallel approach to the one aimed at in this study.

879 Nussbaum’s version is, I think, a more illustrative framework for adopting a relational conception of agency than Sen’s version. It should also be noted that environmental reasons are among Nussbaum’s own motivations for developing the capabilities approach on the Aristotelian basis beyond Sen’s theory, which she thinks stresses more “freedom as an overall good”. Nussbaum 2011, 71.

880 Nussbaum 2003, 40.
outside ourselves (...) to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger”), (6) practical reason (which includes “being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life”), (7) affiliation (which includes “being able to live with and toward others, to recognise and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another” and “having the social bases of self-respect and nonhumiliation”), (8) other species (including “being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature”), (9) play, and (10) control over one’s environment (which includes both political and material aspects).881 These capabilities are, for Nussbaum, not just moral ideals, but form a basis for a distinctive political theory with fundamental normative principles.882 These capabilities form a “threshold” theory of social justice; a partial (though not exhaustive) basis for justice in society, and therefore, a just society cannot ignore them.883 Compared to John Rawls’s shorter list of ‘primary goods’, Nussbaum’s list of capabilities is both complementary and corrective. It also complements the standard human rights with which it is closely allied.884

Three features of capabilities representing human good are, I think, worth special attention for the purposes of this study. First, Nussbaum ties capabilities closely with experiences of meaningful life. They do not describe factual situations, in which these experiences are realised, but the experience itself. These experiences are notably relational by nature. Second, capabilities are notably defined as the goods of an active agent, rather than just an existing subject. Action is thus essential for agents: they need to and wish to use their capacities for acting, which influences who they are going to be. Third, although capabilities belong to “individual persons, and only derivatively to groups”,885 they refer to the relational nature of persons.886 Nussbaum’s theory adopts the social or cooperative constitution of human goods as capabilities of individuals. Therefore, many of the ten capabilities are defined through cooperation with others in the form of good relationships. For example, bodily integrity, affiliation, other species, and control over one’s environment are good “positions” in the web of the world: goods are, in these cases at least, best defined as relational issues.

Nussbaum’s justification of the ten capabilities is Aristotelian, and mainly naturalistic, but not reductionist.887 Human capabilities represent final goods, and they have a claim to be realised also in practice.888 But instead of defining them in terms of fixed properties, Nussbaum focuses on the structure of experiences that are described to a large extent in relational terms. And at this level, capabilities are claimed to be universal, virtues being based on them even though experiences take

883 Nussbaum 2011, 40-41.
884 Nussbaum 2011, 62-5.
885 Nussbaum 2011, 35.
886 By not addressing capabilities to groups, Nussbaum stresses that capabilities belong to each and every person; no-one may be used as a means to the capabilities of a group. In this sense, her theory is not a theory of social well-being, and seems to contradict the relational idea of agency.
887 For Nussbaum’s departure from the Aristotelian view, see e.g. Nussbaum 2011, 128-31.
888 Nussbaum 1995a; Nussbaum 2011.
various forms. But although they take different representations in various times and cultures, they are natural enough to form a basis for claiming that capabilities based on them carry with them some normative claim. Common capabilities are, according to Nussbaum, empirically speaking, relatively stable: they have appeared in different societies throughout history. The list of capabilities must, however, remain abstract, because each society and cultural situation may have its own ways to define the concepts of good. The listed capabilities are, thus, proposals on which to build principles of just policy. In order to justify the list of human capabilities, ongoing inquiry concerning the components and valuable human functioning for the good life is necessary. Such an inquiry does not merely provide a justification for the list, it is also a guide in solving conflicts between the components. This kind of non-reductive naturalism has been widely acknowledged as the core of the attractiveness of Nussbaum’s theory. The good life is not a “closed” case.

Non-reductionist neo-Aristotelian naturalism represents metaethically a midway position: the justification of virtues is based only partly on “fixed” features of the human good life, while the justification of capabilities representing features of good life is constructed. But there are constraints for constructivism: human good is in a way “speared” in the ecological nexus and is not reducible to the individual subject. This means that one’s experiences of the good may be unique, while the structure by which it emerges may be universally real. The experience depends, however, on the ecological place of the experiencing agent. Human good, accordingly defined, should be seen fundamentally as a pluralist concept, although a certain type of universalism does remain. To put it more exactly, Nussbaum rejects a reading of Aristotle that would contradict the (basically Humean) idea that morality is derived from attitudes rather than objective descriptions. She points to a “non-internalist” definition of human good. Nussbaum thus revises Aristotelian naturalism by refusing reductionist conceptions of human nature. This aspiration points to the cooperative structure and relational nature of valuable human agency.

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889 Nussbaum 2013, 631-33. “The point is that everyone makes some choices and acts somehow or other in these spheres: if not properly, then improperly. Everyone has some attitude and behavior toward her own death; toward bodily appetites and their management; toward her property and its use; toward the distribution of social goods; toward telling the truth; toward being kindly or not kindly to others; toward cultivating or not cultivating a sense of play and delight; and so on. No matter where one lives one cannot escape these questions, so long as one is living a human life. But then this means that one’s behavior falls, willy nilly, within the sphere of the Aristotelian virtue, in each case.” Nussbaum 2013, 633.


893 Nussbaum disagrees, for instance, with Bernard Williams, who argues that Aristotle thinks of his notions of human nature as scientific facts, distinguishable from ethical values (Williams 1985). In contrast to that, Nussbaum thinks that nothing in Aristotle’s work corresponds to the modern fact-value distinction. For him “science, as well as ethics, is ‘internal’ (...) in the sense that it is the attempt to give an intelligent account of human experience of the world” (Nussbaum 1995a,102). According to Alexander, Nussbaum’s theory is especially promising and attractive for two reasons: First, she defends Aristotle’s non-reductionist reading and resists “co-option of Aristotle by modern reductionism” in a way that shows the irreducibly plural character of values to be an inherent fact of human life: a human way to look at life cannot be restricted to a single perspective. Continuous interaction is needed between the first and second nature of a human being in order to understand what it is to live the good life. Second, Nussbaum advances this view to concern not just ethics, but also political philosophy and practice: “for Nussbaum, an ongoing inquiry into what can and ought to be the components of the good life – and more particularly, what it means to live a life in accordance with practical reason – will also have a political role”. Alexander 2005, 169, 175-76.
At this point, the floor is open for discussion about metaethical implications of relational moral agency. I argue that Nussbaum’s midway approach to metaethics can be strengthened, or appears to be increasingly coherent, if definitions of final human goods are clearly articulated to correlate with the relational functions of agency, bound to collaborative features of human activity, and if the sphere of cooperation is not restricted to cooperation between human individuals, but includes ecological others as well. Understanding the functions of human agency relationally means that they contain mutually transactive interactions between social and ecological constituents. Such processes constantly constitute their own function, which is the locus of the agent’s reasoning. In naturalist ethics, the function of the agent defines both the “good for” the agent (natural good) and sets a reason for the agent to act, which is its “good at” (final or moral good). The “fixed” point can be located in the activities that constitute what a (valuable) human functioning is made of. They are, if a relational interpretation is taken to hold true, responsive or dialogical moves towards facing harmoniously the constraints of human life determined by the physical and mental externalities and the contingent others.

Human aspirations that play a role in striving for personal and social goals and, thus, “provide a space for the pursuit of human flourishing”, also have another role to play in Nussbaum’s capabilities approach: as a partial definition of social justice, the capabilities approach specifies people’s political entitlements, and such an approach to social justice is itself aspirational. It seems that there are thus moral reasons to make visible what natural human activity is in relation to others. Certain structures of social relations and interactions can be claimed to be more human, better enhance human activity, and provide more space for the pursuit of human flourishing than some others. Nussbaum’s project has been widely recognised as a reconstructive approach to political philosophy that is also capable of contributing to political discussions on sustainable well-being, in which the natural requirements of capabilities are central. This depicts, I think, its potentiality to cross the borderlines between constructivism and naturalism at the theoretical level. It could also, in my view, do it with its definition of capabilities, that is if the capabilities were defined in terms of relational functions.

The questions how to connect moral concepts (final goods) with the natural concepts (goods for), and how to explain the motivation of earthly beings to do what they ought to do for moral reasons (reasons that are relevant to the critical force of ethics) are among the challenges faced by environmentally motivated modest realism. A person who argues for ecologically relational agency, would be pleased to defend some of the modestly realist theories in order to justify the idea that ethics is

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894 Nussbaum 2016, 301.
895 Normative arguments for environmentally sustainable well-being have been developed in the capabilities approach, e.g. by Breena Holland and Elizabeth Cripps. See Holland, B. 2012 and Cripps 2013.
896 It is worth noticing, however, that the conceptual link that holds between, say, final good and good for in the case of relationally understood agents differs from the link between final good and good for in the case of essential or evolutionary conceptions of agents, or in the case of good for as constructed by the individual or social mind. Good for a relational agent refers to the balance of constructive relationships. John Nolt has scrutinised the conceptual relationships between is, good and ought in environmental ethics in a way that goes beyond the usual interpretations. See Nolt 2006, 2008, 2009.
autonomous enough to make moral judgements truth-apt (at least in a modest sense) in reference to the final good without giving up the contingency of every single “good for”. The capabilities approach could be among the options here, but as it does not seem to go far enough, I argue that applying an ecologically relational view of agency could refine the answers given to the challenge. I shall return to this point in chapter 5. If we take Nussbaum’s capabilities approach to be a normatively convincing theory of justice, some direct normative implications from the adoption of relational agency would emerge. Since the structures of reasoning and the constitution of relational agency are altered through the practical interactions that take place in socioecological niches, the conditions for the future of reasoning and other capabilities need to be preserved by preserving the conditions of these niches as instances of natural environment, and by cultivating an eco-social civilisation and proper socio-cultural interactions.897

A few basic comparisons between versions of neo-Aristotelianism are still worth making visible here. The basic supposition for Foot, Hursthouse and Nussbaum is that there is some objective understanding about human good and, hence, some objective moral truth is connected to human nature. Their views, however, slightly differ from each other. Foot argues that there are some common features in human nature and social life that work as constraints on an understanding of the human good, and that therefore some objective moral truths exist at the same time as some other moral judgements are true only by reference to the standards of a certain society.898 Hursthouse, for her part, concerns herself with the critics against the normative force of natural features. According to her, a good human being is someone endowed with characteristics that depict specifically human ways towards natural ends, which are four: survival, reproduction, enjoyment that is characteristic to one’s type, freedom from pain and the good functioning of the group. The human way differs from the ways of other species in that rationality is a salient feature in human nature, and we can give different normative weights to different characteristic human behaviours. But we do this in a rational way, it is regarded as a human good that we have reason to pursue.899 Nussbaum takes a position that is, in one sense, more Aristotelian and, in other sense, more constructivist than Foot’s position. The core value of the capabilities approach, metaethically speaking, is in its novel way to combine the ideas derived from naturalistic human goods (universal goods for) and constructed human goods (agent-based goods for) in the concept of moral goods (final goods). This can be called tentative realism.900 I argue that this tentativeness is something that resonates well with the idea of relational moral agency, if only the ecological structure of agency is adopted.

It has now been shown that the relational notion of agency challenges some common naturalist explanations of moral reasons by pointing to the fact that capacities of agency emerge from and develop by the structures of ecological and

897 Breena Holland has argued for climate obligations on the grounds that practical reasoning requires relatively stable environmental conditions. Conceiving human agency relationally would, however, widen this view to concern practically all of the listed capabilities. See Holland, B. 2012.
900 Hursthouse 2013b, 651.
social relationships. But this influence is not one-directional. Nature is influenced by the mixed operations of agency in ways that make changes in its causalities. And in the next moment of time, since agency again takes place in the webs of those influenced natural partners, further actions and influences depend on the way in which these webs are constructed. If moral concepts refer to natural facts, as naturalism claims, it does not necessarily imply that these concepts are entirely externally determined. In the actual situation, natural facts are always also constructed.

I have argued that implications from adopting an ecologically relational concept of agency in the case of naturalism turn the focus (a) to define human flourishing by flourishing of the webs in which we live in, (b) from human nature and flourishing to the conditions of human action and agency, (c) to consider nature and its functions bound with the constructed structures of agency, (d) to consider virtue as an issue to guide the line of constant changes of the agency, rather than as a stable character, (e) from knowing the moral fact to knowing how cognitive operations may enable ever better constructions of moral good, and (f) from cognitive contents of moral judgements to cognitive structures and epistemic mechanisms by which any content can be formulated. Metaethically speaking, the relational conceptual shift challenges the naturalist way of defining the source of normativity reductively. But what can make natural goodness a norm or final good if the agent is not defined as it usually is? Here, the concept of ecologically relational moral agency may offer a suitable solution: despite the fact that the idea of natural good becomes both unsure and unstable, the idea of final good can still be anchored to the idea of flourishing. Normativity may arise from the capacity for moral action as such: the ability to set final goods, which enhance cooperativity and harmony between goods for individuals and collective agents. One implication of relational agency thus challenges the idea of naturalist moral realism as robust realism and calls for relationally minimalist interpretations. Therefore, for instance, the strength of the robust arguments for moral naturalism by reducing moral codes to evolved inclinations fails.

4.3 CONSTRUCTIVISM CHASTENED BY THE NATURAL RELATIONSHIPS OF AGENCY

4.3.1 ANCHORING CONSTRUCTIVISM TO STRUCTURES OF NATURE

Moral constructivism, according to which the correctness of moral conducts results from a suitable procedure, metaethically reduces moral reason to human practical reason. Normative principles are justified by showing that they would result from

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901 Unawareness about the ‘good for’ entails from the complexity of relationships, through which the identity of an individual agent is continuously constituted. But the natural ‘good for’ also changes through actions of the agent itself – mainly via its external partners and changing ecological place, to which it contributes. As the natural ‘good for’ moves on, partly due to the agent’s active contribution, the distinction between that and the ‘final good’ becomes intertwined: each actual situation in a way determines what is possible to be targeted as the ‘final good’.
such a procedure constructed by human agents. In the case of constructivism, relationally considered agency implies a shift in the concept of suitable procedures. Most significantly it forces extending the body of those taking part in the construction of the procedure: the ecological situations of the agents and the diversity of relationships by which the agents are constructed should not be set aside. On the one hand, the sphere of constructions should include nonhuman partners and material conditions, usually considered external to the constructive structures, and on the other hand, focus should be turned away from individuals and even collectives as units and towards the mechanisms of being related. It will be shown that relational agency challenges social explanations of ethics by involving material relationships embedded in the very functions of agency. The agent-dependency of moral facts and their truth value may thus be approached by the procedures, but only if they are grounded on the mechanisms of relationality rather than on the humanist notion of discourse or other narrowly considered human social interaction. Appropriate mechanisms of being placed and related should be seen to enhance self-reflectiveness and the reasonableness of the procedure.

When the social construction of moral identities, knowledge and action is already subscribed, the ecologically widened sphere of those participating with the process of construction (including nonhuman others, systems of material nature, landscapes and physical experiences) could, in theory, be easily acceptable. However, in the humanist approaches the procedures to justify moral judgements do not take into account that the morally significant processes of reasoning or discourse, by which the procedures are formulated, could extend beyond the restricted human mental processes shared by the members of the unique species of *homo sapiens*. If accepted, ecological relationships entail that constructed moral identities, knowledge and actions are constrained by the structures and processes of external reality. The idea that these constraining elements should be appreciated as something that offers the perspective that carries with it hints of truth is against the traditional interpretation of constructivism. The ecological relationality of the agent would thus move constructivism towards naturalism: the non-constructed facts of nature belong to the constitutive elements of moral reasoning. A metaethical implication would make constructivism compromise some modest idea of realism. Agent-dependent procedures need to be ecologically functioning in order to be accepted as suitable for ethics. But the ecological surrounding and external operations taking place there are active in construction rather than being a result. In a way, relationality chastens constructivism and shifts it towards realism, even of a naturalist type.

According to one social explanation of morality, shared experiences, intersubjective practices, affective ties, and a sense of solidarity precede any communal life. As these factors form conditions for constructing moral conducts and agreement, the focus of ethics should be on the practices connected to them. Ethics is influenced by cultural truths and personal representations. But as these are

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902 However, many constructivists, for instance John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, in fact restrict the interactive processes of construction to relevantly similar partners. The problem of animals and other non-human partners not being included has also been criticised by the constructivists themselves. See, for example, Korsgaard 2011 and 2012c.
constructed rather than stable issues, metaethical measurements can be drawn from the direction of the cultural development. Feminist ethics, for example, seeks for emancipation from certain social structures. In a way, it subscribes an idea of open-ended enhancement of social structures. Another type of social explanation of ethics focuses on the functionality of the social moral system: moral conducts can be evaluated by their functional adequacy. This explanation reduces the acceptance value of a moral system to a particular human praxis. For example, when pragmatists argue that reliable ethics must function in a real world. A relational conceptual shift does not quite agree with either explanation. Reliable moral systems can be plural, since the (changing) systemic constitution of agency, but also (changing) ecosystem structures set evaluative criteria for the functional adequacy of moral systems. The conditions of agency tie the evaluative criteria to the natural facts of the earth.

According to social constructivism, there are no shared natures. Therefore, forms of justified, successful social life can vary without contradiction. But since agent-dependency does not refer, in the case of social explanations, to biological or mental individuals rather than social interaction, they often use relational vocabulary. This implies that social structures are, to some extent, both the criteria of moral evaluation and an outcome from moral practices. If we add here the idea of collective intentions and relational autonomy, constructivist ethics should, perhaps, not be called agent-dependent but structure dependent. Constructivist ethics is largely an issue of practical reason concerning appropriate ways of being related with different others. From the point of view of relational agency, each act of practical reasoning contributes to further the conditions of moral reasoning. Adding, again, ecological and biological interactivity to the picture, the process of emancipation towards better moral systems, and thus ethical measurement, should inclusively cover the development of biological systems, ecological, material and aesthetic structures, and

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903 In contrast to that, a standard naturalist view considers virtue as the means for moral enhancement – to be anchored to facts about virtuousness, facts that are “already there”. Culturally formed interactions between individuals and their social environments are constitutive to what it is to be human, but they are not fixed. Berger & Luckmann 1966, 183; Geerz 1973, 35, 53. As communication about ethical standards is tied up with the pre-existing sense of community (and the solidarity of others grounded on shared experiences), standard constructivism includes objectivity concerning the idea that the community as such is not constructed. Bernstein, R. 1983, 230.

904 Timmons 1999, 87-88.

905 Peterson 2001, 52-3. Especially if contextual social relations are conceived to constitute the agent, personal viewpoints cannot be externalised from the construction of principles.

906 As relational sociology is a growing field of academic sociology, the influence of a relational understanding of social constructions to moral philosophy is currently highly relevant. My interest here is, however, limited to the relational understanding of moral agency as it has been described in this study, especially on how such a concept impacts forms of procedural realism or the reliability of moral judgements.

907 Humanity refers to the diversity of particular kinds of being human, and differences should not be dispelled. For feminist constructivism, for instance, the good life is constructed via interactions with different others. Therefore, differences are necessary for making emancipative development in social life and moral cultures. Ignoring fundamental differences brings about polarisation and oppression. Plumwood 1993, 55-9; Mellor 1997, 115; Warren 2000, 90, 105; Hekman 1999, 110-13.

908 According to mainstream constructivism, relationality refers to the way structures are constructed, and does not usually depict a criterion, but describes rather the method for the good of individual beings. Care ethics is among the few famous exceptions that seem to best correlate with the perspective of relational agency.

909 Korsgaard 2003, 105.
the interaction between human and other animal species. As constitutive for agency, their quality partly directs the process of emancipation.

In contrast to both relativism and agent-independent realism, constructivism may reconcile the plurality of agent dependencies with a unified moral fact via certain agent-dependent procedural methods providing agreement. Procedural realisms use some reliable methods for right and good, which means that the truth can be defined in terms of directed procedures instead of the cognitive contents of moral concepts. Normativity may then be grounded, for instance, on the overlapping consensus of rational deliberation (John Rawls), the structure of society (David Copp), discourse (Jürgen Habermas), or the self-constitution of an agent (Christine Korsgaard) – perhaps also on relationality. Common to all procedural models, the grounds for normative concepts are connected to the constitutive features of moral agency, not in agent-independent moral facts or definite “human nature”. The proper use of the social or individual structure of agency functions as the measure for reliability. It is worth acknowledging that procedural constructivist theories hold normally – without necessarily adopting relational agency – that the element providing the objectivity of moral norms is located in the processes taking place in interactions, such as discursive agreement. Procedural mechanisms can also provide comprehensive rules for social life. But, as the conception of agency is central for definitions of procedures for moral truth, the agency providing normative judgements defined relationally will result in a different theory than agency defined in a traditional, modernist way. The implications of relational agency seem, at first sight, controversial. On the one hand, extended, hybrid operations of agency seem to overrule the possibility of considering practical knowledge in procedural terms, because it means that there are instructions which if followed would allow the subject to accomplish a cognitive task. Relational interaction cannot be predicted, which means that such instructions do not exist. On the other hand, ecologically relational agency should always be seen as bound to biological and earthly conditions: involving ecological contributors in the process of moral constructions in fact involves some natural ecological conditions of the “good-for” in the final sense. In that sense, constructivism may become more resistant to relativism and approach soft realism without denying that actual moral judgements are constructed by scientifically plausible, contextually reasoning agents. This improves its acceptability among environmentalists.

Realist and antirealist constructivists disagree whether a moral principle resulting from the right procedure is true because it is an outcome of such a procedure or because the procedure succeeds in producing outcomes that represent the moral fact. Procedural projects do not necessarily represent a traditional form of cognitivism.

Unlike common procedural theories, here the interest is in the procedures of the correct practising of mutual relationships in the constitution of an ecologically relational agency.

This is how, for example, Päivänsalo interprets John Rawls’s theory, which he argues is compatible with the idea of truth. Päivänsalo makes this tendency explicit in his own Rawlsian view by modifying eight principles of dialogical reasonableness. See Päivänsalo 2007, 101-105, 168.

Rowlands 2009a, 58.

Moral realism does not require agent-independency, but the problem is that agent-dependent realism (such as virtue-ethical naturalism) often applies – or is considered to apply – either to some speculatively metaphysical, or scientifically implausible conception of “human nature” to which the truth of moral concepts is connected. This has also been the main criticism against neo-Aristotelian naturalism. The criticism against, for instance, Nussbaum often claims that her views are incompatible...
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Adopting ecologically relational agency to constructivism implies that the embodiment is not only a condition of reasoning but a way to approach rationality. The patterns of body-environment coupling that determine fundamental human experiences of the environment remain central for information-gathering later on. However emotionally tied, they enhance conscious acts of meaning-making and knowledge formation. Therefore, body-based intersubjectivity cannot be ignored in notions about the nature of truth-aptness. The processes from which the meaning of moral concepts emerges are neither merely emotional nor cognitive but fundamentally relational. The body-based construction of meanings allows us to think that there are constructed but relationally objective contents for moral concepts, and a reliable ground to transform socially constructed moral systems for the better. Moral philosophy remains uncertain with regard to moral truths, but despite uncertainty, it can offer hope; as Mark Johnson states, “it will help us struggle to discern better from worse possibilities within a given situation”. The constraints provided by bodily and ecological experiences limit alternatives in a way that may significantly assist in achieving reliable directions for continuous constructions. An absolute universal governance theory remains, however, an illusion.

I argue that the relational agent-dependency of moral reason does not imply relativism, but on the contrary, a theory may prevent relativism by locating the idea of construction in the natural framework of the earthly conditions of life. The truth value of moral concepts in non-relativist constructivism is usually connected with the idea of moral identity. It can be defined as social, communal or collective identity (as in communitarian ethics), as individual identity (as in discourse ethics), or as relational identity (as in care ethics). The moral identity of an ecologically relational agent may include features of each, although the emphasis is on relationality. But since it broadens the conception of a group, it dispels some differences between the three types of identities. Does this have implications for the compatibility of constructivism with realism? Moral realism is committed, in its robust form, to three theses. (1) According to the semantic thesis, moral predicates refer to moral properties in a way that moral statements represent moral facts, and propositions of the statements are (at least approximately) true or false. (2) According to the thesis concerning truth, some moral properties are true. (3) According to the metaphysical thesis, the truth value of moral propositions relies on the metaphysical status of moral


915 E.g. Johnson 2007, 20, 50-7. These meanings involve unconscious bodily processes in the environment.

916 It should be noticed that the concept of realism supposed to be coherent with the ecologically relational agency significantly differs from Hilary Putnam’s internal realism, in which the truth conditions are internal to the cultural context and cannot exceed it. For a relational view, truth conditions are located in the interconnections and ways of collaboration, which implies that even though they vary with regard to the perspective, in the mechanisms of being related there can be shared features that refer to truth in the sense that these features are advantageous for relational agency. In this sense, all cultural contexts share the same truth conditions.

917 In order to provide an opportunity to progress, moral principles “must never be allowed to solidify into absolute rules, for then the opportunity for moral growth and progress is undermined”. Johnson 1998, 66-7.

facts and properties to be not relevantly different from the status of non-moral facts and properties. While the most usual minimal models of realism exclude the metaphysical thesis and defend (non-naturalist) moral universalism, constructivists usually contradict the semantic thesis. I argue that ecological relationality could provide constructivism an anchor to cohere with realism.

Social explanations of morality deny the idea of cognitively achievable, objective moral facts. The source of obligations in agent-dependent constructivism is in the subjects and their mutual communication. Moral properties then refer semantically to the internal stages of the agent(s). This is often seen to correlate with antirealism. Compared to that, relationally constituted identity, knowledge and action denies the simplified division between external and internal facts. In accordance, anti-realism becomes softened. (1) Concerning the semantic thesis, the clarity of the division between semantic categories, on which its representational suppositions rely, vanishes. Ecological relations being constitutive to moral agency means that even constructed propositions are closely tied with external natural facts, whatever they are. This seems to imply a softened conceptual division between expressivism (supposing a subjective free source of moral concepts) and cognitivism, (supposing an objective external source of fixed moral concepts). This makes both objectivist realism and subjectivist relativism questionable. (2) Concerning the truth value, relationally constructed propositions are always partial and none of the actual propositions may alone fulfil the conditions of truth. But as actual moral conducts some of them in fact can reflect the correct direction towards the truth. (3) Concerning the metaphysical thesis, the relational notion of constructed agency can admit without contradiction that moral facts and properties have a certain natural status. However, it should be noted that the status of both factual and moral facts should be defined non-reductively. This may refer to a type of naturalist realism, but not in a robust mode that reduces moral facts to non-moral facts. But more than that, neither can moral facts be reducible to free choices: hardwired constructivism must be abandoned. Relational agency questions ordinary metaethical categories and brings naturalists and constructivists closer together.

### 4.3.2 AGENTIAL APPROACHES TO RATIONALITY AND THE TRUTH

A familiar question that earlier bothered Kant challenges environmental ethicists who prefer any contextual approach to ethics: How does one reconcile rationality and the autonomy of ethics with the particular and contextual conditions of human reasoning and reflection? The usual way to avoid relativism is by settling the tension between pluralism and objectivity with the help of a procedural approach to moral concepts.

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919 Kant’s division between objective truth and actually valid moral deliberations which it transcends may also be helpful for understanding the philosophical implications of relational agency. In contrast to most interpretations of traditional Kantian constructivism, however, relational moral reason does not require subscribing to foundationalism. Despite this, there is something in the apt structures of relationships that is closer to the realist idea of truth than coherentism supposes.

These procedures reconcile contextual rationalities with the truth-aptness of moral reasons normally by appeal to the idea of shared rationality. However, the recent interest in the dilemma has a unique tone. While modern metaethics after Kant and Hume mainly focuses on the nature of human moral reasons and moral language without questioning the concept of unique humanity, this presupposition seems suspicious in light of the current understanding of complex human operations and agency. Recent constructivists are ready to question the humanist point of view. In this study it has been argued that the capacity for cooperative reason depends on the practices of being related. Moral rationality, if relationality is adopted, cannot be separated from the practices by which it takes place. This makes the Kantian question ever more relevant.

The relational conceptual shift about agency challenges the common idea of moral rationality. Moral rationality is not just something that is related to moral problems, but – self-reflectively – it is also about the conditions and capacities of rationality. The mechanisms of reasoning as contextually bound to social and ecological environments dictate one’s view of rationality, since these environments are constitutive for what is experienced as rational. This means that procedurally defined moral concepts need to refer to the best possible constitution of the moral identity of the agent, rather than, for instance, to justice alone. The experienced environments and the ways they contribute to reasoning are not trivial. Rationality is a flexible concept, which may have different implementations in different contexts. If the capacity for cooperative reason depends on the practices of being related, as has been argued in this study, moral rationality should be something that refers to the communicative agential practices of reasoning and the constitution of the capable reflective agency rather than certain fixed moral conducts. Moral rationality should thus concern, perhaps first and foremost, the practices of being related.

The social explanations of constructed ethics do not necessarily subscribe to reduction, which would lead to relativism, although some do. Applying the relational idea of agency implies that the practices of being related themselves add a directive element to social rationality. Therefore, in the actual situation, at least, truth-aptness can concern the mechanisms of reasoning more than the outcomes of reasoning, however objective these outcomes might be. Objectivity is not reachable by the practical reason of any individual or actual moral community, however inclusive, because changes in the way individuals or communities practise reasoning (which relies on the way in which partners are mutually related) influence actually valid facts. In this sense, relational agency draws the idea of moral rationality closer to care and virtue ethics than, for example, Rawls’s or Habermas’s procedural equality. In feminist ethics, the type of rationality is often relational. From the viewpoint of feminist ethics, better and worse refers to the emancipation of the society.
in which the moral codes are constructed. But it seldom claims that any actual political situation is, in terms of objective rationality, the best; all modes of reasoning and evaluating are deeply embedded in social structures. Despite this, many feminists argue that it is justified to claim that one situation is objectively better than some others. This argument is not, however, easy to defend. The notable advantage of relational rationality here can be that in the spirit of enactivism it brings material and ecological communication into the discussion. This constrains, if not anchors, moral construction.

Procedural arguments in constructivist ethics commonly adopt modernist presuppositions grounded on rationality as an overwhelmingly human feature. The character of a procedural theory changes, however, if the procedures are constructed on behalf of relational type of rationality. Instead of restricting moral rationality to communication and social procedures among human individuals, the discursive agency may be seen as the partner of ecological communication. Common procedural theories are insufficient in light of ecologically relational agency for two reasons. First, they cannot take the ecological point of view or involve other than human partners; the idea of rationality is considered a feature that is unique to human individuals. Second, simplified conceptions of rationality, autonomy and the nature of moral knowledge are often adopted in order to warrant the objectivity of the outcomes. As a relational notion of agency cannot deny that moral ability is embedded in the basic relations of the reasoning agent, it must locate objectivity in the ways of being rationally related. Rationality, as well as autonomy, is thus anchored to the ways of being related, and in these ways the mind, the body and the ecological place are not excluded.923 Moral reasoning is insufficient if it does not involve environmental feedbacks, material structures and the image of an ecological future. Objectivity would require perfect moral rationality, which means that the agency is constructed in ecologically and socially perfect situations. While this never takes place in the actual world, the focus of ethics should be in the mechanisms used to construct interactions and practices and to involve participants in agency.

For a constructivist theory, moral concepts in an actual situation refer to solutions to practical problems. These solutions result from actual embodiment of the process of agent formation, which is itself influenced by previous acts of reasoning. Apt reasoning is relative to that process. In each act, agency takes a new form. A plurality of rational codes of action is, therefore, inevitable; the embodied agencies are different types of eco-social collectives. But despite the fact that the rational outcomes vary case by case, in each actual case one outcome may be the best. However, it is generally not possible in practice to evaluate whether this is the case because of the complexity of agent formation. Although in each actual situation the process seeks for solutions to practical problems, the mechanisms of reliable agent formation are not bound to any particular embodiment of agency. The agent-dependent idea of truth

923 Ecofeminist Val Plumwood, for example, argues against rationalism that the conception of knowledge as a product of reason should be replaced by one that takes into account the operations of the senses and the body in knowledge production. Plumwood 2002, 46. According to Donna Haraway, the object of knowledge should be seen “as an actor and agent […] not as a screen or a ground or a resource […] never as a slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and authorship of knowledge”. Haraway 1988, 592.
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should thus be located, in a relational type of constructivism, in the process of proposition construction rather than in the contents of the proposition. What then counts as a reflected, justified moral proposition would not concern the results of the correct procedural processes but the enhancement of the procedures themselves. The relational perspective to the question whether there are moral truths or not involves a temporal aspect. The question of realism turns into a question of whether changes in moral systems represent the progress of agency formation or not.

If an ecologically relational conception of agency shifts or relocates discussion about the conditions of a justified moral proposition – by separating actual reliability and the processual truth about the constitution of agency, for instance – it will have significant philosophical implications. Truth (in a final sense) would then concern the best possible agency formation, the process of which embodies itself in each situation in constructions of actually reliable and justified truths (in an actual sense). Despite being constructed, actual moral truths are thus conditional to the reality in its entirety, which means that the subject, or a certain cultural narrative or language, by which the moral concepts acquire their meanings, are not isolated from the material and ecological webs of relationships. On the metaethical level, conceptual relationality questions both robust realism and standard expressivism, while both modest forms of expressivism and relationally procedural realism seem defendable: neither require the stability of actual truths. In either case, however, relational rationality is anchored not just to social procedures but to the structures of material relationships, too. The parallel features of constructivism and agent-focused naturalist realism soften differences between them at certain points into nuances, or even make them irrelevant.

Some key ideas of feminist epistemology are worth being reminded of here because of their importance for many of those environmentalists who propose a relational notion of agency. For instance, feminist discussion on the modest notion of a “human type of objectivity” that denies impartial perspectives is, I think, helpful. A human type of objectivity relies on the process of transforming and improving one’s own perspective through imaginative uptake of the other’s perspectives. A few decades ago, feminist epistemologists participated actively in the deconstruction of the modernist paradigm that divides discourse and reality. But instead of constructing a new paradigm for the discourse/reality dichotomy, many feminist theorists began to support the discursive pole of this dichotomy. Ecofeminists, however, developed this discussion in an interestingly different direction from the

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924 Copp 2013, 131-2. Constructivist theories can be categorised in different ways. First, a distinction can be made between cognitivist and non-cognitivist theories. Most cognitivist theories (so-called success theories) add that substantive normative claims are true, and in this sense, they largely parallel realist theories (Copp 2013, 110). Second, there is the distinction between theories that aim at providing substantive accounts of the truth conditions of moral claims, and those that do not. In this respect, some constructivists can be allied with certain types of naturalism. Third, a distinction can be made in relation to the mind-dependence of moral judgements. Constructivist theories are mind-dependent especially in the sense that the truth-aptness of moral judgements is explained by some idealised process of reasoning which relevant agents are engaged in.

mainstream feminist philosophy and created a novel understanding of truth conditions. Their view has many similarities with the idea of a “human type of objectivity” proposed by philosophers leaning on evolutive neuroscience about relational cognitive operations and the embodied mind.  

Feminist modes of agential realism include textbook examples about the nuanced battle between realism and relativism. In spite of the lack of success of some enterprises, the models that were developed at the edge of realism formulated, for example, by feminist philosophers Donna Haraway, Susan Hekman and Karen Barad, should not be ignored when sketching the implications of an ecologically relational account of agency. Initial ideas of relational, non-individualist agency are formulated in these approaches, too. Feminist philosophers usually argue that objectivity can be included in the particularity of epistemic activity, if it properly can respect diversity, embodiment and the dynamicity of discursive agency in a way that corrects the habitual mistakes of common discursive practices. While this standard feminist position calls for procedures of a “wider” “wide reflective equilibrium” (if put in terms of Rawlsian constructivism), ecofeminists wish to locate the discursive method for objectivity at the level of subject construction: objectivity should always be seen as embodied objectivity.  

From this point of view, rationalism, the traditional type of procedural realism and the postmodern type of feminism share a similar kind of problem in regard to reductionism: reduction to freedom as a self-evident mental capacity of human beings. The justification of objectivity is seen to result from symbolic operations, linguistic discourse, or abstract reason. In contrast to them, ecofeminists acknowledge that the agent construction process as such, as an embodied and complex process, should be seen as the method to approach any objectivity, rationality or truth value. According to Donna Haraway’s early argument in the 1980s, objects play active roles in knowledge construction, and therefore, accounts of the “real” world rely on socially and ecologically power-sensitive structures of “conversation” through which knowledge (about both the objects and the subject) are constructed. This material focus was, however, later buried under the postmodern influence in feminist philosophy. As it has turned out later, the non-relational conception of agency was among the reasons that led many feminists to distance themselves from realism and adopt postmodernism. Therefore, ecologically relational agency would improve the original aspiration of those feminists who hoped to overcome the modern paradigm about the conceptual contradictions: discourse vs. reality and nature vs. culture. Material aspects may be included in discourse. I argue

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926 For example, Preston 2003, 125-27; Johnson 1993, 241; Tomasello 2016 and 2018.
927 These four aspects are listed as conditions for a feminist notion of objectivity by the feminist philosopher Karin Widerberg. Holst 2005, 190. According to Lorraine Code, “ecological thinking can generate responsible remappings of the epistemic and social-political terrains, animated by an attentiveness to diversity and specificity, and by a commitment to ideals of citizenship and the preservation of the public trust.” Code 2013, 87.
928 Haraway 1988, 579-80.
929 Mann 2005, 58-60.
930 Haraway 1988, 589-90. The discursive turn partly silenced the realist interpretations of reality and social life resulting from redefinitions of the discourse/reality dichotomy and, therefore, Haraway’s and other’s approaches were usually thought to lead to relativism. Hekman 2004, 235; Hekman 2008, 86-7.
that this originally ecofeminist idea about the meaning of ecological relationships for agency could support feminists’ aspirations to resist the antirealist implication of the linguistic turn.931

A feminist theorist and physicist Karen Barad argues for agential realism, which exemplifies the aspiration to overcome the discourse vs. reality dichotomy by focusing on the relationality of agency. The view moves beyond its origins in the poststructuralist tradition with the help of the adjusting processes of enactment. Barad’s notion of material-mental “intra-activity” acknowledges the dynamic nature of the matter,932 and considers the relationship between cultural and natural elements as one of “exteriority within”. Matter is an active participant “in the world’s becoming, in its ongoing intra-activity” in its performativity.933 This view is sometimes called new materialism, but the key issue is in the relational activity that does not make a clear division between discourse and causality. Instead of making a choice between “absolute exteriority and absolute interiority and of determinism and free will” for causal structure, Barad considers agential intra-actions as causal enactments.934 The common scientific understanding is thus simplified and misleading: “scientific practices do not reveal what is already there; rather, what is ‘disclosed’ is the effect of the intra-active engagements of our participation with / in and as part of the world’s differential becoming”. Objectivity is a matter of “accountability for what materializes, for what comes to be. It matters which cuts are enacted: different cuts enact different materialized becomings.”935 Instead of objects, realism concerns phenomena, which are ontologically inseparable components of agential intra-actions. This view is stronger than the idea of the epistemological inseparability of observer and observed. As nonhumans play an important role in all kinds of natural-cultural practices, Barad considers her agential realism to represent a kind of posthumanism.936

Agential realism makes explicit the integral nature of epistemological, ontological, and ethical frameworks. Ethics, knowing and being are intertwined, “since each intra-

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931 This seems evident in Susan Hekman’s argument. However, as long as the agency is defined as discursive rather than as materially relational, Hekman ends up with an idea of multiple truths that is not easily compatible with realism. See Hekman 1995, 72-76; 110-2; 138-9; 160. For Hekman, moral subjects are “discursive subjects”, which is not the same that they are “relational subjects”. Moral language games are unique, and therefore, “we live in a world of multiple truths”. However, “[k]nowledge is defined as situated yet critical, plural yet providing standards of truth”. She does not provide a justified theory of truth, but the emphasis on relational subjects may give her more possibilities for evaluating a midway concept of truth, I think. Substantive attempts toward the proposed shift are, also according to Hekman, included in Sandra Harding’s constructivist materialism, Lynn Hankinson Nelson’s view of empiricism as community-based knowledge, Lorraine Code’s regulative realism, Bruno Latour’s formulation of the agency of nonhuman entities, Andrew Pickering’s ideas of the world filled with agency and the embodied intellect, and Karen Barad’s agential realism. See Hekman 2008, 89-94,103-4, 109, 110-2. For constructivist materialist epistemology, see Harding 2004b, 38.

932 Relationality defined as intra-activity “signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies” and recognises that so-called distinct agencies “do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action.” Barad 2007, 33.

933 Barad 2007, 135.

934 Barad 2003, 824-5. This should also be acknowledged when talking about nature, which she sees as an ambiguous issue. And this has definite implications in the philosophical notion of constructivism: if nature is “an antecedent entity then its very existence marks the inherent limit of constructivism” (p. 824).

935 Barad 2007, 361. Barad uses diffraction to depict the fact that material and discursive elements are intertwined in a way that causes meanings and mattering. For more, see Barad 2007, 381.

936 Barad 2007, 26, 32, 33.
action matters,” and “because the becoming of the world is a deeply ethical matter”. Barad argues that agential realism has both scientific and ethical implications. The derived ethical view she calls “the ethics of mattering”, according to which, natural intra-actions always have some normative status. Since observations and the agency of observation are “intra-actively” related, the construction of meaning is a material process. Matter is neither a given nor a mere result. This implies that individuals are “responsible for the world of which we are a part, not because it is an arbitrary construction of our choosing but because reality is sedimented out of particular practices that we have a role in shaping and through which we are shaped”.

An interesting feature here is that ethics does not just emerge from the relational structure of the world, but the ethical responses are seen as performative actions by which new matter is constructed. Ethics is “about mattering and taking into account of the entangled materializations of which we are a part”. It concerns “responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming of which we are a part”. Moral agency and ethics are, therefore, issues that exceed the sphere of human beings: “We need to meet the universe halfway, to take responsibility for the role that we play in the world’s differential becoming.” Agential realism blurs the distinction between given and constructed in reality, or between causal and intentional realms. If each new materialisation emerges as sedimented out of the previous states in which the given and the constructed are mixed, our self-construction as moral agents is intertwined in the material reality. This has metaethical implications in definitions of both naturalism and constructivism: reducing moral concepts to natural reality necessarily refers to something constructed and holding them as constructed requires admitting that no construction is independent from natural determinants.

Certain features of Barad’s feminist agential realism parallel the idea defended from the point of view of evolutionary psychology and neuroscience in Michael Tomasello’s argument concerning the legitimacy of moral notions. According to Tomasello, the nature of ethics allows that despite the fact that moral psychology “comes from processes of evolution by means of natural selection”, moral decision making is not reducible to these processes: “Nature makes us creatures capable of making moral decisions, but we make those decisions ourselves.” This can be explained by the hypersocial nature of humans: “early human individuals understood that they were at the same time both judge and judged, so that the concern was not just for what ‘they’ think of me, but rather for what ‘we,’ including ‘I,’ think of me.” Particular moral notions can thus have a special power of legitimacy in individual decision making because of “a kind of ‘we’ > ‘me’ psychological orientation”. Barad and Tomasello can share the view that moral rationality is something bound to agency, and not any type of agency but rather

937 Barad 2007, 32-4, 185.  
938 Barad 2007, 137, 380, 390-6.  
939 Barad 2007, 384.  
940 Barad 2007, 393, 396. “What is on the other side of the agential cut is not separate from us [...]. Ethics is therefore not about right response to a radically exterior/ized other, but about responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming of which we are a part.” (p. 393).  
941 Tomasello 2018, 668.  
942 Tomasello 2018, 668; See also Tomasello 2016.
the agency in which material causalities and social constructions are inseparable. I call this ecologically relational agency.

In such conditions, true moral concepts could be seen as rationally achievable. But since rationality is relational, procedures for rational judgements need to involve all the relevant relationships and partners. If they are constitutive for the agency itself, as the relational approach supposes, the procedures for the best or the most truthful conduct are more like the procedures of agential virtuousness than the procedures of objective reason. In feminist philosophy, for example, it is common to argue that the ethical tone, such as fair or equal participation in the discourse, must precede as a condition for any objective epistemic proposition or rational moral judgement. Some philosophers, like Emmanuel Levinas, give ethics the status of the first philosophy. Objectivity cannot be approached without making changes in oneself through transformative interaction with different others. The results of this transformative relationality partly depend on active investment on the side of the relevant agents. Agential realism refers to truth-apt moral concepts without supposing either objective moral senses or abstract rationality.

The basic difference between constructivist and robustly realist positions, from a cognitivist perspective, lies in the ways of to verify moral truth and certainty. Constructivist procedural realism rejects the requirement of certainty. The idea of truth in uncertainty, and the agnostic attitude about the possibility of achieving absolute truth is common for many constructivists, feminist philosophers, and some pragmatist philosophers, as well as early American environmentalists like Ralf Waldo Emerson and Henry Thoreau. Feminist ethics, for instance, usually considers uncertainty to be a strength rather than a weakness for a moral theory. However, the idea of truth hidden in scepticism found in feminist and environmentalist ethics should be distinguished from both Cartesian methodological doubt and the scepticism claimed by Hume. Scepticism for Thoreau, for instance, does not mark a failure of cognitive effort, but recognition that the primary relation to the world is not cognitive but ethical in nature. The moral value of cognitive uncertainty is that it underlines the ability to seek for – and to some extent even act in accordance with – the truth instead of owning it as a static belief. Cognitive uncertainty forces agents to constantly reshape moral judgements, beliefs and practices by humbly asking whether all relevant partners have been recognised in the agency. Without such recognition, the agency cannot implement moral truth in the best way. The central feature of ethics is the move towards the better. If the idea of relational agency is

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944 Pihlström 2005, 74-5. See “Experience” and “Montaigne; or, the Skeptic” in Ralph Waldo Emerson (1903-04), vol. 3 (*Essays: Second Series*, 43-86) and vol. 4 (*Representative Men*, 147-86) and Henry Thoreau’s *Walden*. Johnson argues that if a moral theory could provide governance through access to absolute principles, “then the opportunity for moral growth and progress is undermined”. But because the world is radically changing, moral philosophy should, first of all, give guidance that springs from “moral understanding, critical intelligence, and the cultivation of moral imagination”. Johnson 1998, 67. According to Richard Joyce’s “agnostic scepticism”, we should not believe moral propositions to be either true or untrue because we are incapable of evaluating their truth value. Joyce 2006, 223.

adopted, everyday practices and habits become crucial in that move. Supplementing a basically cognitivist view by radical uncertainty underlines the meaning of the non-cognitive moral conditions of sensitising oneself to the approaching moral knowledge.

The formulation of relational truth or objectivity is not an easy task, but it still fascinates philosophers with both constructivist and naturalist backgrounds. Relational aspirations to define knowledge and the truth value of moral concepts are present in some feminist approaches as well as in the philosophy of the extended mind, the socially oriented care ethics, and in the materially oriented ethics of place. The relational concept of agency can benefit constructivist ethics in this task, since it relocates truth conditions: truth may not necessarily refer to the ability of the content of an actual proposition to represent (moral) facts; it may refer to the way in which propositions (at each actual moment of time) about those facts are constructed (although the facts as such may be unachievable). This is a realist position but not in a robust representational sense. In my view, this possibility has encouraged ecofeminists to develop relational agency: despite criticising robust realism, they wish to reject relativism. The idea of truth can be defended without accepting common interpretations. The most important dividing element between feminists trusting in the possibility of modest realism and those celebrating the linguistic turn concerns their views of agency. It seems that ecologically relational ideas about agency enabled early ecofeminists to defend the first philosophical steps towards relationally considered realism. I argue that the relational approach to realism has, since then, became an alternative to the common choices between the acceptance or denial of robust objectivist realism.\footnote{See, for example, Mellor 1997, 122.}

However, although ecofeminists usually resist the linguistic turn and adopted a chastened version of social constructionism, they do not commonly articulate that the relational approach implies actual moral conducts to be true only in a restrained sense. Among the few, Anna Peterson puts this clearly: the truth “always escapes human efforts to know and control”. According to her, the challenge for ethics is to balance between recognising the power to construct and change the world and the limitations of that power.\footnote{Neither hard constructivism nor straightforward naturalism survives to offer a balanced picture of morality. Peterson argues that in environmental ethics the locus of truth could be attributed “to the irreducible otherness of nature”. Peterson 2001, 211-2.} Following this line of thought, responsibility concerns the mediation of moral truths by acting in accordance with the self-construction of agency, which takes place in relationships with ecological others, and to do it respectively, dialogically and by inclusively recognising those with whom/which our moral agency is constructed. The truth can only emerge, if relationality is accepted, from the irreducible nexus of the partners concerned. Material limitations restrict and chasten autonomy, but they do not need to dispel responsibility if the agent is considered to shape itself and the world through the very nature of relational agency.

Another ecofeminist, Karen Warren, argues that sufficient conditions of justified action cannot be fixed for sure beforehand.\footnote{Warren 2000, 65-66.} According to her, moral reasons should be seen as the first reasons in ethics and epistemology. “The loving perception” for
Implications of relational moral agency: shifts beyond naturalism and constructivism

others is a precondition for both appropriate knowledge and action.949 Care, thus, refers to the reliability of a process for intellectual and moral advantage in feminist ethics. Care is used quite commonly as a criterion for any appropriate method to approach moral truth in feminist ethics, although care as such is not necessarily considered to be an instantiation of that truth.950 Warren’s view resembles here neo-Aristotelian virtue epistemology, defended by other ecofeminists, Lorraine Code and Linda Zagzebski. Code and Zagzebski argue that wisdom, phronesis, should be seen as the architectonic virtue: it unifies moral and intellectual virtues, which are essentially unified in the constitution of agency.951 However, taking the ecological aspects of relationality into consideration, an architectonic virtue should stress the relatedness of intellectual and moral abilities to the material and bodily conditions.

An ecologically relational narrative implies a commitment between the mutually interrelated partners of agency. In contrast to a causal understanding of the epic of evolution,952 the relational epic also recognises the power from the future through the cultural imagination. In a way, this is a teleological aspect in agency formation: the constructed imagination reshapes and modifies the current capabilities of moral agency and builds or unbuilds the limits for its actions. Imaginations and beliefs about the future take part in the process of agency construction.953 Articulation of the role of the material and ecological aspects for agency – both in the causal and in the imaginative sense – challenges both linguistic (anti-representational) and non-linguistic (representational and realistic) accounts of the truth in a way that softens their metaethical contradiction. In spite of being a contextual language, social codes involve the idea of non-linguistic truth through the ecological constraints of social construction.954 Truth may, however, remain as the non-reducible aim for the process of agency construction. But if the agency construction properly recognises the active responses from the objects of perception, for example, the knowledge it constructs exceeds the narrow idea of agreement among human social subjects. Truth, thus, can be seen to be approached through the process of inclusive relational rationality.955 But this requires benevolent recognition of others. The procedural method should then be that of commitment rather than impartiality, care instead of scrutiny, and love instead of investigation.

Another example of approaching the problem of truth is to describe it in aesthetic terms, as Mark Johnson does, partly appealing to pragmatism: ethical reasoning aiming at the truth is structured by aesthetic experience, meaning and action, which

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952 See section 2.3.1. For the mythical use of the epic of evolution, see fn. 152.
953 E.g. Peterson 2001, 226-7. Unfortunately, theories of procedural realism usually remain unclear in this respect on both the constructivist and the naturalist side.
954 See, e.g. Curry 2003 and 2008, 51-3. Curry sometimes calls his position relational pluralism, although he has not used this name in most of his publications for reasons unknown to me. Nevertheless, his position is understandable, because the idea and implications of relational moral agency have not been clearly articulated, and the term relationality has often been used vaguely. Formulations of relationality in the sense used in this study are still more glimpses of aspiration towards a new philosophical paradigm than established theories.
give value to the personal life.\textsuperscript{956} Imagination of “the better” thus depends on the relational creative activity and the human praxis that philosophical inquiry cannot exceed. Ecological reality thus forms a limit to philosophy, but at the same time, all philosophy aesthetically reflects that reality. The ability to transcend one’s own perspective can be included in the relational creative force that connects different perspectives. Like Johnson, Christopher Preston also argues that creative imagination provides transperspectivity. This refers to things like creative synergy, empowering recognition, and collaborative or dialogical creation.\textsuperscript{957} Moral order, thus, can be described in terms of recognition of others.\textsuperscript{958} According to Preston, this is realised in particular through the physical environments with which we interact, in which we live, and which we also create. There is “a moral structure to material culture”, and the epistemic importance of physical environments cannot be dismissed. Environments are thick with constructed moral norms, and no moral culture can get rid of their influence.\textsuperscript{959} Knowledge and language are always placed in their environments. Therefore, following this line of thought, construction is never free or physically impartial.

This kind of naturalist twist in relationally revised constructivism has one especially interesting implication from the point of view of environmental ethics: the normative status of environmental responsibility lies in the complex importance of environments for moral reasoning and agency. According to Preston’s place-based constructivist ethics, responsibility for material things precedes any appropriate construction of moral judgements. Material structures and moral beliefs are reciprocally related. The recognition of ecological others and material structures makes them visible and thus sustains and reasserts their role in the interaction, and this in turn influences moral beliefs and strengthens the moral culture in this particular place. But the risk of moral degeneration is always there: if material others are mainly generated or manipulated, the moral structure of material culture justifies beliefs that narrow or flatten the life of moral agents.\textsuperscript{960} According to Preston, this explains the normative status of claims against environmental manipulation. Hope for moral progress, too, lies in the fact that moral beliefs refer to material culture: the material things beyond construction, something wild, can be recognised more or less properly – and they may constrain the construction in the direction of the more objectively good.

Taking the operations of agency as extended and relational seems to blur the robust dichotomy between considering moral concepts as either facts or constructions (or expressions). The content and construction of moral conduct cannot thus be conceptually separated in a traditional way. Actual moral facts are

\textsuperscript{956} Johnson 2007, 282. When an experience or understanding gives value, significance and form to our lives, it can be described in aesthetic terms. See Lakoff & Johnson 1999.

\textsuperscript{957} Preston 2003, 127.

\textsuperscript{958} Preston refers here to Charles Taylor’s theory of recognition. Recognition theories may have interesting potentiality with regard to moral rationality for environmental ethics, which would be worth investigating.

\textsuperscript{959} Preston 2009, 175, 179-81.

\textsuperscript{960} “When acting responsibly, societies will endeavor to create structures that embody the beliefs and values they hold.” Preston 2009, 177-80, 182, 185-6. In Preston the idea of narrowing and flattening influences on our lives is adopted from Charles Taylor. See Taylor, \textit{The Ethics of Authenticity} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 6.
necessarily plural. However, a question arises whether they can in the final sense converge if the plurality of perspectives will, through appropriate relational series of reconstructions of agency, be optimally intertwined.

4.3.3 TOWARDS HYBRIDISING METAAETHICS

Constructivist approaches that articulate metaethically interesting positions on the basis of the conception of agency are worth analysing in order to sketch the metaethical implications of the relational shift. Despite the fact that the two examples I shall focus on do not clearly subscribe to an ecologically relational notion of agency, they are informative for the purpose of constructively articulating what an agent-based relational metaethics could be. Christine Korsgaard and David Copp formulate constructivist types of soft moral realism that challenge robust realism by not subscribing to the semantic thesis, but without denying the metaphysical thesis of realism. Both construct a metaethically modest view on the grounds of the concept of moral agency that they adopt. Copp focuses on socially relational or collective identity, and Korsgaard on reflectively structured identity. Both explain normativity constructively in a way that is compatible with modest moral realism but challenges traditional interpretations of realism. Despite admitting that moral reasoning is contextual, and even the concept of rationality is relationally constructed, the authority of ethics and, in a relational sense, at least, the autonomy of ethics (which both are important features for realism) can be defended. Copp constructs a mixed, realist-expressivist metaethics with a pluralist-teleological explanation of normativity. As a hybrid theory, it combines non-representationalism concerning moral concepts with a collective idea of agency and social morality. Korsgaard’s neo-Kantian constitutivism is interesting especially for its explanation of normativity through the self-construction of agency, which offers a platform for adopting a relational notion of agency. Both theories shift constructivism slightly toward naturalism. In my view, the ecological relationality of moral agency could interestingly shift their conclusions and provide novel perspectives on the normativity of environmental issues.

With regard to the concept of moral agency, Copp emphasises collective moral autonomy and the social structures of normativity. Korsgaard, who highlights Kant’s idea of communication as constitutive for reason, opens up space for the idea of relational reasoning and autonomy for a neo-Kantian philosophy. Korsgaard locates the source of self-reflection and normativity in the agency that involves

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961 The purpose is not to compare them, as they do not clearly discuss with each other. But each combine these discussions that show parallel tendencies in regard to metaethics.

962 The recent history of mixed metaethical positions combining objectivism and relativism has its roots in twentieth-century philosophical honesty to realities and practical moral reasoning. Some seeds of the discussion were sown, among others, by Wittgenstein and pragmatists like Dewey and Putnam. Both defenders of relativism and objectivism have modified mixed theories, but due to the wide range of their origins and philosophical fields of interest, the discussions have been rather fragmented.

963 Copp 2007a. His focus has currently moved slightly towards the construction of social agency, which comes closer to the idea of relationality. See Copp 2015.
natural interpersonal relationships. Both philosophers are also interested in evolutionary explanations of morality. They admit that human morality is just a special type of animal morality and is nothing exceptional. By appreciating the evolutionary explanation of agency, they share with non-reductionist naturalists the view that the strict division between constructivism and naturalism results from an implausible notion of human morality. The question of the strict contradiction between realism and expressivism and aspiration beyond the ordinary dividing lines in metaethics are issues in a wide discussion in current moral philosophy. Among the key points in that discussion is, as both Copp and Korsgaard seem to insist, too, the plausible conception of moral agency. I argue that the concept of agency plays a role in situating an ethical theory into the debate between realism and antirealism. The contradiction between realism and expressivism, for example, largely relies on the idea of the freedom of the intending agent. Proper articulation of the role of agency in conceptualising normativity is thus central for theoretical clarity.

Korsgaard argues that the metaethical difference between constructivism and realism concerns the reason for using normative concepts, not the truth value of propositions: in realism normative concepts are used to describe normative facts, while in constructivism they are used as “schematic markers for problems that we have to solve”.

964 Korsgaard 1996. Korsgaard has analysed and famously drawn to public awareness the intersubjective aspects of Kant’s moral theory. See, for instance, Jane Dryden, Bridging a Gap between Feminism and German Idealism (Dissertation. Fordham University, New York. ProQuest LLC, March 2008).

965 See, for instance, Beauchamp & Frey, The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). But while Copp mainly focuses on the environmental conditions of epistemology and the philosophy of place, Korsgaard’s emphasis is on animal agency, on the animality of a human moral agent, and on the common collective that humans and other animals form together from the point of view of the good-for. See Korsgaard 2013, 23-25.

966 Korsgaard 2006 and 2010; Copp 1995, 2007b and 2011. Against “constructive sentimentalism”, according to which moral claims are made true by someone having a certain (evolutionarily appropriate) emotion, Copp argues that moral claims are made true “by facts about, roughly, which moral sentiments are such that, if they were widely enough shared in society, would best enable members of the society ‘to function collectively in stable and productive ways’ and to coordinate their behavior”. Copp 2011, 593. The idea is developed in Copp 1995 and 2007b.

967 “Realism and expressivism are both true in their way. But establishing that realism is true in that sense is not the end of moral philosophy, in either sense of ‘end’: it is only the beginning.” Korsgaard 2003, 118; Korsgaard 2008, 325; “Expressivism, I believe, is like realism also true after all, and also in a way that makes it boring,” Korsgaard 2003, 122, n. 49. See also Korsgaard 2013, 23; Copp 2001; Copp 2008b. For criticism about the aspirations to mixed metaethics, see, e.g. Nadeem J. Z. Hussain and Nishi Shah, “Meta-ethics and Its Discontents: A Case Study of Korsgaard,” in Carla Bagnoli (ed.), Constructivism in Ethics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2013: 82-107). For a kind of teleological argument in Korsgaard’s theory, see Korsgaard 2009, 27-38.

968 “Marks out the solution to the problem of how the benefits and burdens of social cooperation are to be distributed”. Korsgaard 2015, 146; 2014, 419.

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face the problem. Korsgaard’s constructivism does not deny the existence of truth nor modest, procedural realism. I shall return to her view in the following sections.

Copp formulates a constructivist society-centred moral theory that exploits evolutionary theorising in the theory of normativity but refuses reductionism. The normative status of social codes is explained by the notion of collective agency. Copp seems to avoid reductionism because of the concept of the collective that plays a special role in the theory; in fact, he does not clearly make a distinction between naturally and socially constructed collectives. His theory is a functionalistic type of constructivist naturalism. It accepts the Darwinian hypothesis without reducing moral propositions to non-moral presuppositions: evolution can explain the social structures of human animals, and moral reasons are constructed in the naturally evolved structures of collective agency, but they are not reducible to natural facts.

Copp accepts the adaptive link account, according to which, through evolutionary processes, “humans developed a tendency to form moral beliefs that favor importantly prosocial kinds of behavior, including behaviors that promote social stability, peacefulness, and cooperation.” Copp’s position may be counted as realism, but not in the standard sense of realism. A moral proposition is true, according to him, “if a corresponding moral standard is included in or implied by the moral code the currency of which in the relevant society would enable the society better to serve its basic needs than would the currency of other sets of norms and better than would be the case if no set of norms had currency in the society”.

Copp divides between two types of moral truth: moral propositions and moral standards. The truth conditions of moral propositions are described in terms of the status of corresponding standards: a proposition is true if the corresponding moral standard has relevant truth-grounding status, which is the status of being morally authoritative. The moral authority of social moral codes depends on the ability of the codes to serve the basic needs of a society. Moral authority, thus, refers to society-like, or nexus-type agency that authorises the standards rather than to a group of subjects. Moral properties, such as wrongness, can be seen to refer here, I think, to

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969 “If constructivism is true, then normative concepts may after all be taken to refer to certain complex facts about the solutions to practical problems faced by self-conscious rational beings. Of course, it is only viewed from the perspective of those who actually face those problems in question that these truths will appear normative. Viewed from outside of that perspective, those who utter these truths will appear to be simply expressing their values.” Korsgaard 2008, 325.

970 Korsgaard has been criticised specifically about making decisive steps from constructivism towards realism by appealing to transcendental arguments. See, e.g. Crisp 2006, 52-5 and C. Larmore, The Autonomy of Morality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). On the other hand, William FitzPatrick criticises Korsgaard for abandoning realism. FitzPatrick 2005, 657-59. Despite the fact that Korsgaard’s view is explicitly constructivist, she does not deny the idea of truth. See, for example, Korsgaard 1996, 36, 113-14, and Korsgaard 2003, 112-19. FitzPatrick argues that the recent tone of Korsgaard’s approach raises the question whether her solution to object to the normative gap between an agent and the principle can also be exploited by a realist thinker. FitzPatrick 2005, 659.

971 Copp 2007b, 13-26; Copp 2008a, 198-9; Copp 2013, 124, 128.

972 However, he emphasises that the adaptive link account “does not depend on the truth of the moral judgements that it predicts Darwinian forces would have led human beings to be disposed to accept”, but neither is it incompatible “with their truth or approximate truth”. Copp 2008, 201. Copp uses Philip Kitcher’s descriptions of the four-stage process through which Darwinian forces affect the content of moral beliefs. See P. Kitcher, “Biology and Ethics” in D. Copp (ed.), The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006: 163-185), 173. See also Copp 2007b, 2009a, 2009b and 2011.

973 Copp 1995, 252-53; Copp 2008a, 200.
the mechanisms of relational reality. The truth value of moral judgements is then approximate. 974

Normativity emerges, according to Copp, from the fact of pluralism, which involves an aspect of teleology. 975 This teleological aspect can be seen as a generalisation of John Mackie’s idea of morality being a “‘device’ needed to solve ‘the problem’ faced by humans because of ‘certain contingent features of human condition’”. 976 But contrary to Mackie’s idea that “morality is normative only to the extent that it would be practically rational to adopt this device for a relevant purpose,” Copp states that “the norms of practical reason themselves constitute a ‘device’ that is suited to ameliorating a ‘problem of normative governance’.” 977 This idea, which he calls pluralist-teleological theory of normativity, thus underlines the mechanisms of collective agency that are required to ameliorate problems. Mackie’s view amounts to antirealist error theory, since he believes that moral judgements presuppose the existence of intrinsically prescriptive normative properties, which, he thinks, do not exist. In contrast to that, Copp argues that such a presupposition is unnecessary, and the device theory is compatible with normative realism. 978 So, normativity emerges from pluralism in accordance with the norms of collective practical reason that uses the teleological aspect included in actual pluralism as the device to solve the practical problems of society. Normativity arises thus from the practical rationality of a collective – which Copp calls society – and the collective requires a teleological aspect in which the plurality coheres. 979

Despite the fact that different normative systems, to which the truth conditions are bound, are needed to ameliorate different problems, “pluralist-teleology provides a unified account of the truth conditions of a class of judgments that bear on solutions to practical problems that are endemic to the human condition”, namely the standard of practical rationality. In all normative systems it is the problem of agency, and especially autonomy, that determines the standards of practical rationality. The expressive nature of actual moral judgements is bridged with realism about the teleological nature of normativity by autonomy: “the normative system with the function of dealing with the problem of autonomy is always relevant to evaluating deliberation”. Whatever this system is, it “determines what we are rationally required to do”. 980

According to Copp, we cannot think of autonomy without the natural facts that make up its reflective form. The contents of the standard of autonomy represent the truth, but at the same time, autonomy makes it possible for an agent to be directed by her own standards rather than some objective standards. 981 When appealing to the

974 Copp 2008a, 199-201.
975 Copp 2001; Copp 2008b; Copp 2009b; Copp 2015.
976 Mackie 1977, 111, 121; Copp 2009b, 22. For Mackie, morality is a device for ameliorating the problem that “limited resources and limited sympathies together generate both competition leading to conflict and an absence of what would be mutually cooperation”.
977 Copp 2009b, 22.
978 Copp 2009b, 22-3; Copp 2009a.
979 Copp 2009b, 22; Copp 2001.
980 Copp 2009b, 35-6.
981 Autonomy represents relativity for Copp. The standard of autonomy is to connect moral virtuousness with particular facts about what it is to do well, rather than with some objective standards.
idea of collective autonomy, Copp’s theory seems to have a relational tone. Normativity is based on the constitution of collective agency, namely its functionality. Therefore, objective and relative elements of a normative notion are mixed and hardly separable. Objectivism lies in the function of sociality: “the moral truth is a function of the content of the moral code the currency of which in society would do most to ameliorate the problem of sociality”. Such a code is ideal. Copp’s view thus seems compatible with realism, but not objectivism in the actual sense of morality. Actual morality “is the solution to the problem of equipping people to live comfortably and successfully together in societies”. Actual normative systems need to be pluralist in order to ameliorate actual problems of society, but behind the actual judgements there exists “a unified account of the truth conditions”. This account ensures solutions to the problems that are “endemic to the human condition”.

This position can be defined as a metaethically hybrid view. Copp calls it realist-expressivism, as it mixes the basic substantive intuition of expressivism about the central role of non-cognitive attitudes with modestly realist truth conditions connected to the natural functionality of a collective agent. Among environmental philosophers it has been recognised as one of the promising metaethical midway approaches. Hybridity concerns especially moral semantics: “[r]ealist and expressivist semantics both fit all or most or many determinate standard uses of moral language, and this is not incoherent.” Copp’s successful way to develop a hybrid theory is interesting, because it is grounded on the extended conception of collective moral agency, on which the authority of norms is based. He claims that the metaethical positions overlap, and grounds the claim partly on the idea of collective agency. The supposition has been put forward in this study that such an overlap would be plausible if an ecologically relational understanding of moral agency was adopted. Copp’s project sustains this supposition: an agent-dependent naturalism can be compatible in all the crucial aspects with agent-dependent constructivism. Copp argues, in fact, that “many constructivist theories have non-
constructivist sister theories”. The decisive element for “pairing up” naturalist and constructivist theories concerns agent-dependency, which turns the focus to the definitions of agency. Focusing on the idea of relationality – which binds the ethical theory with agency – thus implies that naturalism and constructivism move closer to each other: relational agency necessarily mixes constructive and given aspects in the nexus of agential operations.

According to Copp, the constructivist idea of reflective or deliberative procedures as methods towards valid moral principles does not rule out the fact that derive principles are true in a non-procedural sense. Moral principles are true not just “because they are the outcome of the procedure”. Procedure provides moral principles or beliefs that are necessary for the evaluation – so they carry some true evaluative fixed point – but they do it without their evaluative content being reductive to the procedure. I think it is worth making two conceptual distinctions here: one between the evaluative content and the descriptive content of a moral principle or belief, and another between the actual truth and the final truth of the descriptive content of a moral belief. While the descriptive content resulting from the procedure refers to the actual truth, the ultimate evaluative content (the second level descriptive content) – the one that functions teleologically for ameliorating the constitution of the agency – refers to the final truth. We can well think that the descriptive content is (actually) true and that the evaluative force of the principles exists, because they are the outcome of the application of the procedure, without thinking that the evaluative content (or, final descriptive content) is an outcome of any actual application of the procedure.

If I am right, Copp’s approach supports the overall argument for relational realism by relativising the dichotomy between constructivism and naturalism in an agent-derived way that chastens the tones of extreme metaethical arguments. It is an example of a realist alternative to antirealist error theory that appreciates its achievements and accommodates to the clearly and externally realist conception of truth (contrary to the notions of internal realism). Copp combines the pluralism of normative reasons with the unified account of the truth conditions and – worth highlighting – it does this through the idea of collective moral agency and autonomy, through which the notion of pluralist normativity becomes justified.

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989 Copp 2013, 110, 125.
990 Copp 2013, 125-8. He thinks that a naturalist notion of moral agency (evolutionary and ecological) can help in refining the theory of truth conditions for normative claim, and to uncover that we can consider forms of constructivism and non-constructivism to be metaethical allies.
991 Distinction is defined by Mark Timmons. Timmons 1999.
992 I shall return to this in chapter 5. The distinction is inspired by Mark Timmons’ notion of non-descriptive moral belief, which is evaluative, but not descriptive. Timmons 1999. However, I think that moral beliefs or assertions can be both evaluative and descriptive, but that we could distinguish between two meanings of descriptive contents: descriptive content that is a representation of the actual truth and descriptive content that is a representation of the ultimate truth. The first sense of descriptive content refers to the factual good for the actual agency to enhance its own constitution as agency, and the harmony of the nexus in order to better approach the ultimate (final) good, which is the descriptive content in the second sense. A moral belief or assertion of any actual agent or web of agency can only have descriptive content in the first sense, and never in the sense of representing the ultimate truth.
993 Copp 2007a, 373, 386; Copp 2006, 220-1.
4.3.4  AUTHORITY AND THE SOURCE OF OBLIGATION IN RELATIONALLY SHIFTED NEO-KANTIANISM

Christine Korsgaard makes an interesting shift in Kantian constructivism by focusing on the agent’s constitution, while grounding normativity on the self-governance of the agency. By this, I suppose, she opens a track to detach a basically Kantian approach from modernist humanism and invites us to pay attention to the relational constitution of moral agency.994 I argue that this has decisive implications for the interpretation of the categorical imperative, which thus cannot be formulated as an imperative between individuals sharing a similar rationality. Instead, the imperative should be seen to concern the mechanisms of the constitution of rationality for agents of different kinds. This is the level from which normativity emerges. The reason for using normative concepts arises, according to Korsgaard, from the constitution of agency for human animals. The metaethical difference between constructivism and realism, which concerns the question about “why we use normative concepts rather than about the truth value of sentences or propositions”, thus refers to the concept of agency. While common realist views refer to normative concepts as descriptions or categorising about the facts that make an action good or bad – to be accepted and followed – constructivists, according to her, use normative concepts as “schematic markers” for real problems and their proper solutions.995 Although the reasons for using normative concepts differ, on the metaphysical level this perspective draws constructivism and realism closer together.

Korsgaard criticises the realist view of goodness as a fact about the action, something to be recognised and applied by the agent. In such cases, another norm would be required to dictate that one is obligated to perform an action (otherwise why should one care about the moral facts?). This exemplifies the normative gap and the lack of explanation of such a norm: where would it emerge? Normative force seems inexplicable in realist terms. According to Korsgaard, actions are morally good or bad in virtue of being good or bad as actions: their goodness is, thus, due to the function of an action. This function is to constitute the agency, and by that, the identity of the agent.996 Conversely, the agent who acts “declares that what he does is good”.997 By explaining the normative force in terms of practical problem solving, Korsgaard eliminates the additional normative question “why should I care?”998 The source of obligations is thus a legislator, namely the agent’s own mind and will, which seems to locate Korsgaard’s position on the side of voluntarism.999 However, I argue that the ecologically relational definition of this legislator, which plays a role as the source of

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994 Although I shall concentrate here on Korsgaard, it is worth noting that arguments pointing in a somewhat similar direction have also been put forward by other constructivists, such as Michael Bratman and David Copp. Copp and Bratman both appeal to the collective agency and interconnectedness that may extend agency cross-temporally (see Bratman 2018), while Korsgaard scrutinises nuanced autonomy by appeal to the natural conditions of human morality.

995 Korsgaard 2013, 23.

996 Korsgaard 2009b, 28-33. According to Korsgaard, “we use the concept of the good to mark out the solution to the problem of what things to aim at – what our ends should be, and of course derivatively what means we should take to them as well”. Korsgaard 2013, 23.


998 This means that “the concern with agency is given, and so therefore is the concern with practical problems concerning that agency”. FitzPatrick 2005, 656-8.

999 Korsgaard 2007a, 98.
normativity, makes a huge difference to what is commonly understood by voluntarism. The implications of the relational revision of the concept of agency are thus noteworthy. I shall clarify this through Korsgaard’s position here, and further in chapter 5.

My question is, can an ecologically relational notion of moral agency contribute to discussions concerning moral reason? Carla Bagnoli formulates the critics’ question against the ability of a basically Kantian constructivism to combine normative and probative reason: “If the contents of reasons are decided, and if reasons are the products of the agent’s deliberation how can they show anything about the world?” Despite the fact that the constructions of legislative reason have universal authority in Kantian constructivism, the worry remains concerning the possibility of moral knowledge. The criticism is justified: constructivists must admit that while reducing moral reasons to the legislative decisions, constructivism is in danger of losing its capacity to account for the critical role of reason in making moral judgements. However, the borderline between realist and antirealist constructivism is not always clear. I argue that on both sides of the borderline, a decisive issue is whether the concept of agency is defined in terms of modernist individualism or ecological relationality.

I argue that the key to Korsgaard’s theory is that moral agency (or the human mind, if the agent is defined as a human individual) has a reflective structure: there is no direct encounter with the self in human consciousness, but the reflective structure of the mind forces us to construct a ‘self-consciousness’. The unity of agency is thus not given, entailing natural individuality; on the contrary, it is a task: “being the seat of a unified consciousness – sets you the task of constructing a unified mind, and a unified agency – in the normative sense”. Korsgaard interprets Kant from this point of view: “When you deliberate, it is as if there were something over and above all of your desires, something which is you, and which chooses which desire to act on. This means that the principle or law by which you determine your actions is one that you regard as being expressive of yourself.” So, the way in which one thinks of oneself through reflective relations determines “whether it is the law of the Kingdom of Ends, or the law of some smaller group [...] that will be the law that she [the agent] is to herself.” Reasons arising from this self-constitution express the identity and “your obligations spring from what that identity forbids”. Reflections in an agent are thus the source of the reasons for action, and the authority of obligations. The structure of agency establishes “a relation which we have to ourselves. And it is a relation not of mere power but rather of authority. And that is the authority that is the source of obligation.”

1000 Bagnoli 2012, 149-50.
1001 Some objections to this critique bring about the situation in which the theory can be counted as antirealism, while other objections hold constructivism to be a form of realism. According to Bagnoli, Korsgaard’s theory represents the former, while her own counts as realism. Bagnoli 2012, 152. See also Korsgaard 2008, 302-26.
1002 Korsgaard 2007a, 96.
1003 Korsgaard 2014, 209.
1004 Korsgaard 2007a, 96-7. Korsgard argues that the concepts of good and bad mark solutions to beings that do not automatically go for the things they desire. Awareness of one’s mental states, self-consciousness, as Korsgaard puts it, “introduces a certain reflective distance between ourselves and our desires, so that we both can, and must, decide whether to act on them or not”. To decide it means to
Michael Bratman raises a critical point about this kind of constructivism that is worth considering before going further. Normative judgements should be subject to corrective standards of intersubjective convergence, while constructivists appeal to judgements from an agent’s perspective for the source of normativity. This causes problems, because the agent’s point of view is constituted by something that extends beyond the agent’s own normative judgements: it is constituted by conative attitudes including elements like intention, love and care, which are not (at least normally) subject to the forces of intersubjective convergence. Bratman argues, illuminatively from my point of view, that the problem here concerns the alignment: judgements from the agent’s perspective (which he calls “input judgements”) are constituted by attitudes (such as love and care) that are not always responsive to the pressures of intersubjective convergence. Therefore, it is not clear how the “output judgements” that are subject to the standards of intersubjective pressure can be constructed out of judgements that are not.  

The proposal Bratman formulates softens, in a way, this alignment: he focuses on the idea of timely extended agency and argues for planning self-governance. As a constructivist Bratman, like Korsgaard, formulates normativity in terms of self-governance: “a norm of diachronic plan rationality” can be defended “by way of the strategy of self-governance”. Diachronic self-governance has an end to which it directs, and this can explain that willpower may take a form of diachronic self-governance. Bratman argues that relevant cross-temporal interconnections can be explained parallelly with the self-governance of a single planning agent over time. Interconnected planning agents may ‘act together’ in shared intentional ways, like they were acting together with oneself. It is important for the argument of this study that Bratman also highlights the fact that diachronic self-governance does not appeal to the tidiness of mental operations. This opens up alternatives to purely cognitivist interpretations of plan rationality. Here, I would say, the notion of relational moral rationality could enter in.

Returning to Korsgaard, I do not see any reason to limit Korsgaard’s idea of the self-constitutive construction of agency under the skin of an individual human being. The unity of agency as a task remains the same even if the agency refers to the extended mind. If the empirical evidence for the ecologically relational nature of mental operations is plausible, mind and will should be extended to the activities that define what is good for me in the final sense. But something defined as good-for me is “to describe something’s relation to my condition as having normative implications, and that in turn is to endorse the view of myself that, simply as a conscious being – as a being who is in her own keeping – I necessarily take of my own condition. One might see the endorsement of that view as an act of sympathy with myself.” Korsgaard 2013, 23-4.

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1005 Bratman 2012.
1006 This, I think, is compatible with the idea that has been presented in this study concerning the evolutive nature of relational consciousness, on which the reason of moral agency relies.
1007 Bratman 2018, 9, 11, 241, 247-9. My supposition is that Bratman’s idea is worth further scrutiny in comparison with the argument developed in this study. His argument seems to come close to what has been strived for here: the agency that involves the constitutive interconnections in terms of collective agency. Bratman argues that relevant cross-temporal interconnections can be explained parallelly with the self-governance of a single planning agent over time. Interconnected planning agents may ‘act together’ in shared intentional ways, like they were acting together with oneself. I would add that acting together with oneself over time requires, however, that the ecological relations are not withdrawn. For his complete elaborated position, see Bratman 2018, especially chapters 1, 10 and 11.
take place in relationships with the environment.\textsuperscript{1008} In the case of ecologically relational agency, this would mean that motivation and non-subjectivism are compatible. Motivating reasons are the actual moral reasons. The source of these reasons is not in the desires of individual subjects or groups nor facts in the metaphysically separate moral realm but, as Korsgaard claims, in the interaction that constitutes the agency. The source of obligation is in conjunction with what we “do in (and to) the world”.\textsuperscript{1009} Although a fixed human identity is rejected, agency can function as the source of both obligation and moral reason.\textsuperscript{1010}

According to Korsgaard, moral authority is based on the reflective structure of consciousness,\textsuperscript{1011} and this reflective self-consciousness, which concerns the grounds of actions and beliefs, “is the source of reason”.\textsuperscript{1012} I argue that adopting a relational view of agency will not prevent a theory from basing moral authority on it. Reflectivity requires autonomy, but not necessarily in the traditional sense.\textsuperscript{1013} However, this is the point in which the capabilities of humans appear to play a central role in moral agency: humans can, perhaps more than animals of any other species, be aware of the way in which various relations and perceptions operate on us (the agent), and influence our action. As the constitution of agency is the source of obligation, this awareness sets to each human being an unusual obligation for taking care of the optimal conditions and constitution of moral agency, that is, to ensure and develop moral capabilities.

The functions of agency are decisive for whether an action is governed by moral standards or not. A relational conceptual shift implies that these decisive functions are ecologically relational. As physical and living partners take part in the constitution of agency, their collaboration makes the agent conscious of itself as an agent, and thus, morally equipped. Whether the agent is morally equipped or not, thus, depends on whether all these partners function well. Therefore, normative self-constitution is an obligation that involves the conditions and capabilities of all that take part in the construction of agency. For an actual situation, moral reasons emerge from the ability

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1008} See chapter 3. According to the extended mind thesis, cognitive processes include “worldly constituents”, and cannot "be identified independently of the world". Rowlands 2005, 25-6. See also Rowlands 2009b.
  \item \textsuperscript{1009} “The intimate connection between person and action does not rest in the fact that action is caused by the most essential part of the person, but rather in the fact that the most essential part of the person is \textit{constituted} by her actions.” Korsgaard 2009b, 100. This echoes what has been said before, and what, for example, Mark Rowlands takes as crucial for relationally extended agency. See Rowlands 2005, 26; see also Rowlands 2006, 83, 91, 93, 102-111.
  \item \textsuperscript{1010} Korsgaard 2009a; 2009b and 2012. It seems that Korsgaard here refers to her agreement with what originally was argued by Onora O’Neill, namely that Kant’s theoretical reason and practical reason can be unified in the requirement for common principle or reason that is regulative for all. And that this unification is based on communication. See O’Neill, O. 1989, chapters 1 and 2. However, in contrast to the modernist idea of impartiality emerging from communication between individuals that share a common rationality, in the case of the relational constitution of agency this would refer to the normativity of the relational mechanisms of moral agency.
  \item \textsuperscript{1011} Korsgaard 1996; 2007a; 2008; 2012d.
  \item \textsuperscript{1012} Korsgaard 2009a, 31; 2011, 103. Reasons due to self-consciousness should be differentiated from intelligence.
  \item \textsuperscript{1013} Korsgaard admits that reasons regarded as my own that mark my autonomy cannot simply be the basis of choices. Korsgaard 2009b, 199. Concerning the difference between human autonomy and animal agency, see Korsgaard 2009b, 81-108; 2011.
\end{itemize}
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to be ideally related. Roughly put, if humans are not aware of themselves being obliged to enhance the conditions and capabilities of their nonhuman contributors in agency, the normative capacity to act for moral reasons may disappear from the earth.

Despite the fact that this relational interpretation of the normative self-constitution of agency is still an explanation for normativity, it is organically linked with the idea of substantive normative concepts: one’s obligation to justify one’s actions arises from the possibility and need to reconceptualise the world and one’s own agency. Together these two tasks constitute, according to Korsgaard, the activity of reason. “The principles of rationality [...] are principles of unification”, which guide the activity of unifying both the experienced world and the self: “What was once simply given to us as the environment is now given to us as a heap of perceptions, or rather, experiences, and it is now up to us to put them back together into a picture of the world.” Unifying oneself through interrelations with environmental others is, according to Korsgaard, what practical reason aims at. Korsgaard emphasises the internal interaction of agency as the constitution of reason, which is the regulative principle for Kant. Throughout this study it has been argued that the activity of constructing the unity of agency takes place in the web of interactions that are perceptive, responsive, reflective, and dialogical. In my view, Korsgaard refers to this by stating that when you make a choice, you are at the same time constituting your identity. Nevertheless, these choices do not take place between “you” and “the world”, rather they are made in the world. The fact that our choices “carry out the work of constructing a conception of the world and a self who is both a knower of that world and an agent within it” is the reason why “we human beings, unlike all the other animals, must justify our beliefs and actions”.

As normativity is based on practical reason, the constitution of agency – which as such is a factual issue – will significantly shift the Kantian position. In light of the relational operations of agency, commitment to the various elements in one’s environment should be of a certain kind in order for them to do their job in bringing

1014 Korsgaard argues, on this line: “There are reasons, because self-consciousness transforms the grounds of our beliefs and actions.” Korsgaard 2009a, 32. Korsgaard actually defends a Darwinian explanation of moral agency, according to which the difference between human and nonhuman moral abilities, however distinctive it is, is one of degree rather than kind. See Korsgaard 2012b, 5-8, 15.

1015 “[W]hen we are faced with the task of justifying our beliefs and actions, it is because we are faced with two other tasks or, we could just say, two other opportunities: we both can, and need to, construct a new way of conceptualizing the world, and we both can, and need to, construct or reconstruct our own nature, as the subject of that conception and as a source of responses to the world.” Korsgaard 2009a, 33.

1016 Korsgaard 2009a, 33. “[T]heoretical reason aims at unifying the experienced world, and practical reason aims at unifying the self.” Korsgaard 2009a, 39.

1017 According to Korsgaard, “our practical principles are expressive of our conceptions of our practical identity. [...] Determining what we have reasons and obligations to do – that is, adopting maxims or practical principles – is at the same time engaging in the work of identity construction, the ongoing project of a human life.” She argues: “[T]he fact that we are engaged in identity construction helps to explain why the process of thinking about what we have reason to do is governed by rational standards, because of the ways in which those standards secure the unity of the self and of agency. In the same way, [...] determining what we have reason to believe is at the same time engaging in the ongoing work of constructing a conception of the world, and [...] this helps to explain why that process must be governed by rational standards.” Korsgaard 2009a, 30-37. For more details, see Korsgaard 1996, 18-26, 41-42, 100-2.

1018 Korsgaard 2009a, 39.
about unity. In that case, the quality of commitment is connected with the concept of good, and at the same time, dictates the constitution of moral agency. There is a normative quality for the ways in which individual agents are committed to various relationships. This formulation approaches the central idea of care ethics. But as a certain quality of commitment is a method, or a procedure for unifying agency rather than the content of a normative concept, moral concepts are not derivable from the actual situation or the constitution of agency alone. But there are elements that make it worthwhile to compare Korsgaard’s notion of the normative constitution of agency, and the included idea of moral ability, with Martha Nussbaum’s capabilities approach: it is essentially bound with the facts on which the existence of “you” as an agent relies, and with the fact that determines what it will be to be “you” and act as “you” in the future. Korsgaard and Nussbaum offer, I argue, interesting perspectives from two different angles that may together, considered in light of valid facts about the relational operations of agency, significantly enlighten what might be meant by “relational” realism.

4.3.5 THE TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENT RELATIONALLY SHIFTED

Alongside of normative force, the autonomy of ethics that provides the critical point of view is an inalienable feature of moral realism that most environmental ethicists think is worth preserving. Christine Korsgaard’s transcendental argument of ethics is procedurally realist in a way that can explain normative force without reducing the autonomy of ethics. It is central to her argument that she applies a kind of communicative relational structure of the agent’s constitution, which is the source of obligation. Concerning normativity she approves the basically voluntarist claim that the source of obligations is a legislator. According to Korsgaard, we stand in that position to ourselves. The argument thus emphasises the role of the internal dynamics of agency, which provides reflectivity and normativity. The self-constitution of agency results conceptually from a relational structure. Korsgaard seems to consider relational structure to be internal to an individual agent, but as I have already suggested, there are no obstacles to make the argument in the case of the ecologically extended relational self-constitution of agency. Such an application could thus exemplify the implications of the relational conceptual shift.

If my analysis is correct, an ecologically relational conception of agency implies a shift that can improve even a basically Kantian ethics to meet the theoretical challenges of environmental ethics. Such a shift also draws the theory interestingly towards metaethically midway positions. For Korsgaard, morality expresses the

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1019 In fact, David Copp argues that a non-constructivist (realist), agent-dependent sibling to Korsgaard’s neo-Kantian agential constructivism can be seen in neo-Aristotelianism. Copp 2013, 131. If Copp is right, both Korsgaard’s position and neo-Aristotelianism can be examined as perspectives that may enlighten the articulation of relational realism.


1021 Korsgaard 1996, 164-5; Korsgaard 2007a, 98.

1022 Korsgaard 2007b, 2008, 2009b. The Kantian concept of humanity thus seems insufficient. Depending on the concept adopted, the basically voluntarist argument for normativity seems either distance or approach realism.
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constitutive requirements of agency. In spite of being substantially constructivist, the theory does not deny that moral concepts are real in the sense that actions are better or worse, but the idea of moral truth does not refer to propositional facts. The perspective is connected with the conditions of agency by which actions can be good or bad.\footnote{1023} Depending on the adopted conception of agency, Korsgaard’s argument for normativity seems either to distance itself from or to approach realism. I argue that combined with the idea of ecologically extended operations of agency, her theory can point to a track for constructing a relationally realist argument in ethics.\footnote{1024} The basic argument for the source of normativity is fairly much a Kantian one. In short, it says:

1. To rationally choose to do X, you must regard doing X as good.
2. You cannot regard doing X as good in itself, but can only regard doing X as good because it satisfies your needs, desires, inclinations, etc.
3. You cannot regard your desiring or needing to do X as making it good unless you regard yourself as valuable.
4. Therefore, you must regard yourself as valuable, if you are to make any rational choice.\footnote{1025}

Thus far the argument only states that the reason to act is based on regarding things as valuable and that the valued things cannot be reduced to whatever desire or need one has; they must refer to the satisfaction of some of the agent’s genuine needs or desires.\footnote{1026} For example, it is impossible to make a rational choice whether to eat a piece of chocolate cake or not without valuing your genuine nature as the one who makes the choice. But here we come to the definition of “yourself”. To make rational choices, it is not enough to refer to the value of oneself.\footnote{1027} The problem vanishes, according to Korsgaard, by turning the focus on reflection. Reflection depicts reasoning and only its command can make an action obligatory.\footnote{1028} But, it should be

\footnote{1023} Thus, it contributes to the discussion on possibilities to reconcile realism with constructivism. Korsgaard combines here elements from naturalist Aristotelian virtue ethics and Kantian constructivism, which makes it, in my view, especially insightful. See Korsgaard 2009b, Korsgaard 2013, 22-25, Korsgaard 2015, 145-50, and Korsgaard 2016.


\footnote{1025} Formulation by Robert Stern. See Stern 2015; 2011.

\footnote{1026} A thing is good just because it is good for me. “[W]e take things to be important because they are important to us – and […] we must therefore take ourselves to be important. In this way, the value of humanity itself is implicit in every human choice. If complete normative scepticism is to be avoided – if there is such a thing as a reason for action – then humanity, as the source of all reasons and values, must be valued for its own sake.” Korsgaard 1996, 122.

\footnote{1027} Korsgaard herself discusses especially the possible problem of ‘self-conceit’, which means that someone regards oneself as supremely valuable just as a particular individual. Korsgaard 1998, 54; Korsgaard 1996, 249-50. Another worry, according to Robert Stern at least, is the so-called case of Satan: In the case of Satan, the argument concludes that Satan must value his devilish nature, because that is his nature, just as humanity is ours. See Stern 2015; Stern 2011, 89-90.

\footnote{1028} Korsgaard starts with voluntarism but, through the feature of reflective operations of natural human and animal agency, ends up agreeing with realism, too. See chapter 4 in Korsgaard 1996, concluded in pp. 164-5. “The fact that we must act in the light of reflection gives us a double nature. The
noted, reflection is also an empirical fact about the cognitive processes. In any case, reflection leads to define “oneself” more generally, for example, in terms of humanity or personhood. The important conclusion is that in order to act rationally, I should not value myself *qua* myself, but *qua* a rational agent.\(^{1029}\)

The conclusion put in these words may still lead us in the wrong direction: to be precise, the idea that a making rational choice requires regarding oneself as valuable does not necessarily refer to any fixed human nature of the agent but rather that the agent is capable of making choices that are good for herself, meaning her genuine needs and desires. The nature of agency works as the nature of our humanity in Korsgaard’s argument. This implies that it is the definition of agency to which moral concepts are connected. Korsgaard’s crucial concept is a practical identity that provides agency. I argue that this makes it justified to think that the core of what must be valued is agency rather than any substantial feature of human nature. If I am correct, it is the capability of agency, defined through reflectivity, that should be focused and valued in Korsgaard’s theory as the requirement for any rational choice for good. In this agency the double natures of identity – reasoning and legislating identity – coincide through reflection.\(^{1030}\)

In the argument based on the notion of practical identity, Korsgaard’s definition of ‘yourself’ no longer refers to the concept of humanity rather than to the identity that has the general capacity of making it possible for an agent to live a life that contains reason, and to act in accordance with it. In order for you to make rational choices, choices that are good for you, you must value yourself *qua* rational agent.

This clarifies the track for understanding the ways in which relational agency shifts Korsgaard’s transcendental argument. Robert Stern formulates the transcendental argument as follows:

1. To rationally choose to do X, you must take it that doing X is the rational thing to do.
2. Since there is no reason in itself to do X, you can take it that X is the rational thing to do only if you regard your practical identity as making X the rational thing to do.
3. You cannot regard your practical identity as making doing X the rational thing to do unless you can see some value in that practical identity.
4. You cannot see any value in any particular practical identity as such, but can regard it as valuable only because of the contribution it makes to giving you reasons and values by which to live.

\[\text{thinking self has the power to command the acting self, and it is only its command that can make action obligatory. [...] The acting self must in any case do what it says.} \text{(p.165).}\]

\(^{1029}\) Korsgaard 1996, 101; Korsgaard 1996, 125: Some of our “practical identities depend for their normativity of our human identity – on our own endorsement of our human need to be governed by such identities – and cannot withstand reflective scrutiny without it. We must value ourselves as human.”

\(^{1030}\) Korsgaard 1996, 165: “The fact that we must act in the light of reflection gives us a double nature. [...] Reflection has the power to compel obedience, and to punish us for disobedience. It in turn is bound to govern us by laws that are good. Together these facts yield the conclusion that the relation of the thinking self to the acting self is the relation of legitimate authority. [...] Autonomy is the source of obligation.” But: “[N]othing can be normative unless we endorse our own nature, unless we place a value upon ourselves. [...] The normativity of our values springs from the fact that we are animals of a certain kind, autonomous moral animals.” Korsgaard 1996, 165. In the elements by which reasoning and legislating identities coincide refers, again, to Korsgaard’s neo-Kantian interpretation of unified reasons (Kant’s theoretical reason and practical reason) through communicative or relational practices. About this unification, see also O’Neill, O. 1989.
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(5) You cannot see having a practical identity as valuable in this way unless you think your having a life containing reasons and values is important.

(6) You cannot regard it as important that your life contain reasons and values unless you regard your leading a rationally structured life as valuable.

(7) You cannot regard your leading a rationally structured life as valuable unless you value yourself qua rational agent.

(8) Therefore, you must value yourself qua rational agent, if you are to make any rational choice.\textsuperscript{1031}

Rational choice conceptually depends on valuing oneself as rational. But what does it require? It requires that I have a reason to act due to my practical identity (as a mother or as a teacher, for example), the reflectivity of which determines my actions. The acts are not independent from the actor in the sense that they have reasons in themselves; it is my practical identity as making X, which gives me reason to do X (step 2). But if the relational notion of moral agency is adopted, this does not only mean that “the acting self must in any case do what [the thinking self] says”. The reason dictating action is bound to “the fact that we are animals of a certain kind, autonomous moral animals”.\textsuperscript{1032} This natural fact is, however, a contingent one. It has not always been so, and it can change. Therefore, the influence between “the acting self” and “the thinking self” should be seen as two-directional. The meaning of practical identities for moral reason is that they contribute to giving us reasons and values by which we live. This is the way in which they get their value (step 4). Identity is an active part of agency, and therefore, it counts. Applying relational agency implies focusing on the activity which takes place in relationships by, for example, moving either toward or away, recognising or ignoring, and joining with or distancing oneself from something. This something contains contingent natural issues, by which the agent who has this particular practical identity lives. Going through to the seventh and eighth step we come back to the conception of “yourself”. Rational choices require valuing of “yourself” (\textit{qua} agent), but this refers to things that make your agency capable.

If rationality is considered relationally, practised elementally in the socio-ecological nexus, then the argument would conclude that we must value our ecologically relational agency. Consider this: if we take reason and autonomy as collective issues, Korsgaard’s conclusion turns out to claim that rational choices require us to value the collective and the conditions of collective reasoning. If the ecologically relational definition of human rationality and autonomy is correct, then the conclusion turns out to claim that making rational choices requires valuation of the balanced functioning of one’s ecological, material and social relationships – besides valuation of the collective and each of its mutually related members.

Five implications follow from adopting ecologically relational moral agency in Korsgaard’s argument. (1) Since we are aware of the mechanisms realised in the constitution of our agency, which is the source of our obligations, we are normatively bound to taking care of the balanced relationships between ecological and social factors. The agency capable of reaching what makes our rationality consists of a nexus

\textsuperscript{1031}Stern 2011, 90; Stern 2015.

\textsuperscript{1032}Korsgaard 1996, 165.
of interactions between various earthly partners. (2) This means that there are some mechanisms to which moral concepts necessarily and objectively refer. Because moral concepts need to refer to the rational constitution of moral agency, which is the reason for action, adopting a relational notion of rationality implies that moral concepts must refer to the function of the relational mechanisms that constitute rational moral agency. These functions are not bound to any particular agent or actual situation. Instead, they are the fundamental conditions of moral agency. (3) This implies that moral concepts are not expressions of some individual or collective mind – even though they get their normative status by being such expressions.

(4) Agency being ecologically relational implies that earthly others take part in the reflective processes that form the source of normativity, but also that the content of obligations reflect back to the earthly others in a way that the obligations concerning relationships with them play a role as conditions of rationality. From the point of view of an agent, such obligations are – in a way – not just constructed. (5) Moral responsibility can be seen as compatible with the limited freedom of will. If you are acting at all, commitment to the mechanisms that constitute your rationality is a fact. In fact, you are committed to some relationships more than to some others and focus on the recognition of some more than others. Because of the complexity of the world and the agent’s cognitive operations, capacities for one moment, that is, one particular actual “agent”, are limited: you cannot focus on everything at the same time. Therefore, making choices is inevitable: you are forced to choose between partners, in interaction with which your practical identity will be constructed. But these choices and interactions are not – at least not entirely – causally determined.\textsuperscript{1033} Whether you recognise certain bodily messages more or less, influences the weight they have in your reasoning. This is also the case with ecological and social relationships. “Freedom” in how you focus or emphasise relationships makes a difference in the constitution of your agency.\textsuperscript{1034} The responses and participations implemented in the nexus of relationships make it justified to regard agents as responsible for the direction in which their agency develops.

4.3.6 FROM ANIMAL AGENCY TO RELATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The Kantian notion of moral autonomy requires normative self-governance, which guarantees that there is an ability to surpass determination. The idea of the normative constitution of agency is usually considered in terms of political philosophy.\textsuperscript{1035} But Korsgaard reconciles natural (evolutionary) explanations of embedded moral reasoning with the constructivist idea of moral autonomy: autonomy is nothing non-natural or unique and necessarily only human feature. On the contrary, human

\textsuperscript{1033} It is worth noting here that causal determination does not even hold for all processes of the physical world, and definitely not in all nonhuman animal life, according to the wide range of current natural scientists, for instance those referred to in chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{1034} This is compatible with e.g. Susan Wolf’s notion of asymmetrical freedom. Wolf 1990, 10. For more, see chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{1035} “When the political state is conceived as an agent, its capacity to act is constituted by the authority relations that determine what counts as a decision made by the state.” Thus, its agency is normatively constituted and “achieved by conformity to certain norms”. Korsgaard 2014, 190-2.
animals and animal agency share a lot, and human beliefs and desires are, at least partly, “the result of the new form of consciousness that emerged” through evolution.\textsuperscript{1036} Unlike usual interpretations, however, Korsgaard argues that this does not imply non-convergence of moral judgements or relativism. Evolution is not a story about the origins of specific moral contents but about how morality evolved through normative commitment and practical problem solving, to which the emergence of the normatively “self-governed animal” is connected.\textsuperscript{1037} In terms of relational agency, obligations for us arise from the constitution of our agency through committing ourselves to constitutive others.

According to Korsgaard, autonomy is not a uniquely human feature: other animals, too, can have agency and act autonomously.\textsuperscript{1038} Autonomy also requires a commitment to others and to our bodily and mental interaction with the outside world. However, humans are, in fact, the only moral animals, since they are aware of the constitution of agency and its mechanisms. As that constitution forms the source of obligations for the agent, humans are, as conscious beings, normatively bound to care for the constitution of their own agency.\textsuperscript{1039} The difference between moral animals (humans) and other animals lies in the fact that humans are conscious not only about their acts and intentions, but also about the reasons and principles that guide their actions and relationships.\textsuperscript{1040} The ways in which humans are related with other beings and elements thus differs from the ways other animals are. This difference between humans and other animals is not, however, one of kind – as Kant supposes – but only the one of degree – as Darwin supposes.\textsuperscript{1041} Korsgaard’s Kantianism thus involves an important Darwinian perspective: reflective distance is possible for beings whose evolved conscious abilities are complicated enough. Once this level is reached, a difference emerges between those who are responsible for their agency and those who are not.\textsuperscript{1042} The empirical difference in the constitution of identity is, therefore, practically influential, because it makes the one who is aware of her attitudes and the potential influence on her attitudes morally responsible for the actions she is aware of.\textsuperscript{1043} If relationality in agency formation is taken seriously, it is

\textsuperscript{1036} Korsgaard 2010, 22; Korsgaard 2011; 2012a; 2012b; 2012c. See also section 3.4.3.
\textsuperscript{1037} Korsgaard 2010, 22-23. It is worth noting here that the project of relational realism does not thus entirely oppose the heritage of the Enlightenment but could carry on its revised form.
\textsuperscript{1038} Korsgaard 2012a; 2012b; 2012c.
\textsuperscript{1039} Korsgaard 2010, 21-3.
\textsuperscript{1040} Korsgaard 2009b, 104-8; 2011.
\textsuperscript{1041} Korsgaard 2006, 109.
\textsuperscript{1042} Korsgaard 2011, 102-3. “We can say that his [nonhuman animal’s] fear, or his perception of the object as frightening, is the ground of his action—it is what causes him to run. We can even say, by analogy with our own case, that it is his reason for running, although he does not know that about himself. But once you are aware of the influence of a potential ground of action, as we human beings are, you are in a position to decide whether to allow yourself to be influenced in that way or not. [...] You now have a certain reflective distance from the impulse that is influencing you, and you are in a position to ask yourself ‘but should I be influenced in that way?’” “[T]he difference [...] is not that we are self-conscious and they are not. [...] Human beings have a particular form or type of self-consciousness: consciousness of the grounds of our beliefs and actions. [...] To be capable of normative self-governance is to be [...] capable of governing yourself in accordance with the laws you make for yourself. And as far as we know, although it is an empirical question, no other animal does that. If that is so, human beings are rational and moral animals, and the other animals are not.”
\textsuperscript{1043} “We are aware of the grounds of our action,” and therefore we are “in a position to raise a normative question, a question about whether the action you find yourself inclined to perform is justified.” Korsgaard 2011, 102.
not enough to talk about the actions concerning some eternal issues. It should be added that such an agent is also responsible for her reflective ability, which means that she is responsible for cultivating the relationships that constitute her agency.

The mechanisms of moral agency are laws for an agent that is aware of those mechanisms, according to Korsgaard: human agents constitute their agency by adopting laws to govern their actions. But these laws may “succeed or fail” in performing agency. Whether I succeed or fail to perform my own agency is due to my ability to follow the mechanisms that best constitute myself, my own agency.1044 For relational agency this takes place in relations with others. Mechanisms of self-constitution thus represent the procedure for the best and the truly good. This correlates, if my interpretation is correct, with practising in the best possible way those relationships that make our autonomy and self-governance possible.

Moral autonomy and self-governance result from the relations we have with others, not from an awareness of our mental attitudes in the traditional individual sense. Mental attitude language can be used for distancing your attitude from your world by recognising that the way the world seems to you is not the same as the way it seems to me, and that this is due to your attitudinal contribution to the way the world is for you.1045 Only by these relations can we acknowledge the interconnectedness between our attitudes and the way the world is for us – and thus, distance our mental attitudes from the world. Korsgaard claims that the mechanism of self-governance, and hence, normativity, has its origins in natural history: members of the human species began to assume control over themselves and their responses because of the influence they had on the other’s attitudes and on the way the world is for them, which resulted in an awareness of their own attitudes.1046 This assumed control over themselves was, however, directed to ordinary, “non-moral” activities: autonomy already takes place on the basic level of activities. But since we “recognize the ways that conceptualizing, evaluating, and responding to the world are things that our minds do […] then we begin to do them in a whole new way, namely self-consciously”. To believe and act on the basis of normatively committing thoughts (such as “yes, this is what I believe’ ‘yes, this is the right thing to do”) “is to be a normatively self-governed animal”. As an implication, the use of mental attitude language about ourselves starts to carry normative commitment, and new questions arise about the correctness of doing things. What is a good reason to act or a good ground for belief?1047 The self-governance requires engagement in one’s constitution and responses to the world which for each of us takes a particular form.

1044 Korsgaard 2014, 196-7; 1996. Korsgaard also believes that “the norms that constitute mental activity are the laws of reason,” which means that “mental activity is not just governed by rational norms – it consists in following rational norms.” Korsgaard 2014, 203. Therefore, she offers Kant’s proposal, the categorical imperative, as the normative ground appropriate for constituting agency.

1045 “[W]as he in danger? well, he believed that he was; well, he was certainly frightened. A gap between the way the world seems to me and the way it seems to you appears to me at first as a distortion in a way it seems to you; so I conclude that something about you must be distorting the way it seems to you. If I am a dominant animal, perhaps I see this as an occasion to inhabit your response. But when I begin to see occasion to inhabit my own responses, then I also begin to regard my self in a way that […] I was regarding you.” Korsgaard 2010, 21-2.

1046 Korsgaard 2010, 21-22.

1047 Korsgaard 2010, 23.
This kind of constitutivism includes a meta-normative idea that norms governing certain agential states can be explained by what is constitutive of the agential state. The constitutive standard of an action is its self-constitution. The idea of self-constitution links the efficacy and the content of the norms on which we act: “We make ourselves into agents by following norms that express the formal essence of spontaneous efficacy, and we make ourselves into the particular agents who we are by material content that we give to those formal norms.” The special feature that is recognised either as an advantage or a problem for Korsgaard’s constitutivism is that it makes a connection between descriptive and normative elements of good via agency. Hence Kant’s division between theoretical and practical reason does not totally hold. But neither are they reducible to one another. Korsgaard’s constitutivism does not contradict between cognitivism and non-cognitivism: moral judgements are conclusions of practical reasoning rather than descriptions of facts or expressions of emotions. Contrary to both reductionist naturalism and non-naturalism, normativity is based on the self-authenticating account of standards of practical reason. So “the reason for an action is not something outside of, or behind, or separate from, the action. Giving a description or explication of the action, and giving a description or explication of the reason, are the same thing.” The idea of constitutive norms is that they partly describe how to reason about practical matters correctly and partly also distinguish practical reasoning from other mental processes.

Although acting for a reason is a factually explainable natural phenomenon, normative concepts add the aspect of moral responsibility, which is “a problem for rational beings, because we do not automatically go for the things that we desire”. An agent’s awareness of her mental – and physical – states “introduces a certain reflective distance” between herself and her desires: she “can, and must, decide whether to act on them or not”. Normative concepts thus add a special feature to the practical reason that connects the constitution of identity with normative rationality. The practical constitution of identity, thus, plays a key role for

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1048 Korsgaard 2016, 42.
1050 Korsgaard 2003, 105. An action "embodies its reason," and so “being motivated by a reason is not a reaction to the judgment that a certain way of acting is good. It is more like an announcement that a certain way of acting is good. The person who acts […] declares that what he does is good.” Korsgaard 2008, 228-29.
1051 “So rational action is not just a matter of being motivated by certain facts about good-making properties of actions – say, that the action will help one’s mother, or that it would satisfy one’s desire. Rather, it is a matter of being motivated by the awareness or belief that these facts constitute good-making properties of the action.” And “rational action is action that is self-consciously motivated, action whose motivation is essentially dependent on consciousness of its own appropriateness.” Korsgaard 2008, 214. This is the reason why animals are not responsible: they lack the normative aspect of their practically reasoned functional good, because they lack consciousness of their own appropriateness.
1053 The disputed issue about the relationship between justification (resulting from a cognitive state of mind) and motivation (resulting from an attitudinal state of mind) can be relocated through the analysis Korsgaard gives. In contrast to locating justification in the objective world (reached by cognition) and motivation in the subjective world (reached by conation), they are different instantiations of how we use attitude language about ourselves. Constitutive interactions of agency, expressions of which constitute motivations, bring about both belief and commitment, not just commitment.
1054 Korsgaard 2013, 23.
obligations. However, identity is not necessarily an individual thing or a stable state of affairs. According to Korsgaard, self-constitution involves the adoption and maintenance of “practical identities” including “the roles and relationships in terms of which we value ourselves and find our lives worth living and our actions worth undertaking”. Whatever promotes and constitutes practical identity is included in “the functional sense of good-for and therefore the final sense too”. If identity, rationality and autonomy are to be defined as ecologically relational constitutions, as I would suggest, then the content of normative concepts are partly derived from the mechanisms and function of the factual ecological nexus of life. It seems that Korsgaard would agree that the normative self-governance is bound to the relationality of an agent; and if so, it provides a normative link between us and all by whom/which we become aware of our own agency. But the fact that Korsgaard does not especially articulate the meaning of ecological and material relations is, in my view, a weakness.

Korsgaard explicitly rejects the naturalist idea that “the final good for people is survival and reproduction, or simple maintenance, or even to lead a healthy life of our kind [...].” But she argues that – despite the two senses of good, namely functional good-for and good in the final sense, are separated – they both refer to “the same set of facts, but from two perspectives”. This is because an agent is at the same time a functional system having functional goods-for, and a conscious unit having efficacy to go for what is good from her own particular point of view. She necessarily values her own efficacy, which means that she values her functional good “as an aspect of his final good”. In order to be and become an agent capable of acting, however, a teleological constitution of agency could be seen to determine what is functionally good for the particular agent: while acting alters the agent, functional good develops.

1055 While Kantian philosophers say “[t]he agent must think of herself as a citizen of the Kingdom of Ends”, meaning that practical reason is linked with one’s practical identity, they actually agree that the coverage of the moral law derives from how the agent identifies herself. Korsgaard 2007a, 96, 106.
1056 Korsgaard 1996, 101; Korsgaard 2015, 149.
1057 For the emergence of normative self-governance, see e.g. Korsgaard 2010, 23.
1058 Korsgaard 2015, 149. She thus leaves the door open for a naturalistic interpretation of final good, if it is extended to include capacities. In my view this nicely refers to Nussbaum’s approach.
1059 Health, for instance, exemplifies the good in a functional sense, by referring to the agent as a functional system and its ends but it is not valued as a means rather than the excellence or goodness of the physical life. “What the practice of moral virtue makes us capable of [...] is virtuous activity itself. In fact for this very reason, Plato and Aristotle frequently compared moral virtue to health.” Korsgaard 2015, 143.
1060 “An agent necessarily values his own efficacy, and therefore necessarily values his own functional good as an aspect of his final good.” Korsgaard 2015, 148.
1061 Some critics question whether Korsgaard’s constructivism differs from realism about constitutive norms. See Bagnoli 2011. Instead of a problem, I would find it promising for understanding how good-for in the final sense might be involved in actual practical problem solving when located in the relational webs of agency.
1062; FitzPatrick 2005, 659, 684-91. According to FitzPatrick, Korsgaard’s model actually offers good tools to bind normativity to reason without abandoning realism. The basic aspiration, which Korsgaard identifies with constructivism, but not with realism (in its usual sense, at least), is to formulate “something which would tie the principles in question to any agent’s will without relying on claims of intrinsic normativity”. FitzPatrick 2005, 690.
Having final good is, according to Korsgaard, an essentially relational state rather than a state of consciousness: “having final good just is standing in relation to evaluative goodness that is made possible by consciousness”. Leaning on Kant, she argues for the idea of good (good simpliciter) “as a criterion for identifying, or better, for constructing, the good itself” or “looking for the ends that we can share”. But a solution for the problem of shared ends, which is to be named ‘good’, or good-for all, requires – to put it in the terms used in this study – a relational understanding of identity. In Korsgaard’s view, the reason to operate with moral concepts is that we are forced to face the task to construct conditions that are good for all. But to “operate with the concept of good” requires an agency that is “capable of seeing the world through the eyes of others”. Without cultivating proper relations, empathy and commitment, it is not possible to meet the task to construct “a state of affairs that is, as far as possible, good-for us all.” Hence, the moral obligation of promoting good-for all calls for a proper relational construction of moral identity and agency.

Things that constitute and promote practical identities are good, according to Korsgaard, not only because they do this in some instrumental sense. Instead, “successful maintenance of our practical identities is the excellence of our lives”. The processes that make our identities are crucial. But as has been argued above, on the grounds of given scientific evidence, these processes should be defined as materially, ecologically and socially relational. Subscribing to relational view implies that unifying moral reason has to do with the mechanisms operating in relationships by which practical identities become maintained. Adoption of an ecologically relational conception of agency would not make any dramatic changes in Korsgaard’s theory as such, but it would make possible to argue for the normative status of our environmental relations, which are, as partners of our agency, parts of our functional and final good. Our obligations would cover the good-for wide range of partners that influence our reasoning.

Korsgaard also emphasises the mutual relatedness of cognitive virtue, moral epistemology, and identity: “Importantly, because you are a functional system that works by tracking your own good through perception and thought, when you do get it wrong, you are malfunctioning. The very fact that you don’t know what’s good for you is, in a way, a large part of what is wrong.” Tracking our good makes our functional system work, which in turn is made possible by us knowing what is good for us. Cognitive ability and functional efficiency then are inseparable in the concept of the good. According to critics, this forms a circular argument that may appear as a weakness of the constitutive theory. I argue that at this point, clear articulation of

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1062 Korsgaard 2013, 22.
1063 Korsgaard 2013, 24-5.
1064 Korsgaard 2015, 150. Although there is no guarantee that Korsgaard would subscribe to it, thinking that successful maintenance is not possible without paying attention to ecological relationships is compatible with her idea. She states that “things that promote and constitute the maintenance of our practical identities are final goods because as self-constituting beings, we see them as things to go for”. This may also be seen to support environmental responsibilities.
1065 Korsgaard 2015, 149.
1066 See Bagnoli 2011 for notable critical arguments. In my view, what it is relevant to call into question is her individualistic tone in concepts of moral identity and rationality. I argue that Korsgaard’s view could benefit from explicitly articulated ecologically relational agency, which could even be seen as
the ecologically relational functioning of mental operations considered as moral
deliberation would offer some help. As a non-individualist conception, a functional
system refers to the complex webs in which the actual good changes through each
action through the changed actual state of affairs, instead of an isolated individual
who both dictates and is dictated to. Anchoring function to the elements promoting it
through material and social transactive relationships could thus prevent circular
arguments.\textsuperscript{1067}

Korsgaard’s position does not clearly exemplify the type of relational moral agency
that has been articulated in this study. However, an ecologically relational notion of
agency is quite compatible with Korsgaard’s basic formulation, and at some points
the theory seems to presume relational constitution agency. This especially concerns
her idea about the sources of normativity in self-constitution. I do not find any
obstacles for Korsgaard’s theory in accepting an extended conception of relationality,
including ecological relationships as transactive for the identity of the agent. The fact
that mechanisms of relatedness could add a non-constructed element, referring to
functionally well operating constitution of agency to the fundamentally contextual
conditions of that constitution could even strengthen the idea of a convergence
between constructivism and realism in the theory.

The contents of moral concepts in constructivist ethics are usually defined by
referring to socially, communicatively or culturally constructed issues in which the
subjects are defined in humanist terms. Moral concepts as measures for better or
worse may refer in a constructivist approach to the reflective equilibrium (as in John
Rawls’s theory of justice), to the emancipatory narrative (as in some forms of feminist
ethics), to the reliability of social cooperation (as in the society-centred ethics
formulated by David Copp), or to self-governance (as in Christine Korsgaard’s
approach). The view about the decisive agency for construction in these theories has
been defined, in my view, fairly narrowly. I argue that considering agency in the
ecological webs by extending agential operations to the environments of the
deliberator would link ethics interestingly with other fields of philosophy and natural
sciences, but also draw them closer to moral realism by modifying the idea of moral
construction. Ecological and material relationships as constitutive for the functions
of agency and moral rationality intertwines constructed moral concepts with
something substantially not constructed by individual agents or particular collectives,
namely the natural mechanisms of relatedness providing moral capability.

The ecologically relational conception of agency turns the focus (a) from opposing
reasoning and reason to the connection between the real and the constructed, (b)
from discourse to discursive-material transactive processes, (c) from purely social
structures to ecological (including social) structures, (d) from acceptance as
justification of moral conduct to natural-social reliability, and (e) from the function
of an actual individual as the measure for the proper constitution of agency and as the

\textsuperscript{1067} If moral agency was conceptualised as ecologically relational, this could even be seen to defend
a teleological idea of moral development in the argument. Crucial from the point of view of successful
maintenance of practical identities and enhanced moral epistemology are then the procedures of
constituting relational identities.
source of normativity to the mechanisms of the relational constitution of agency in which individuals only play a constrained part. A relational approach could resist critics against relativism, because the authority of ethics derived from relational constitution of agency is not subjectivist in the usual sense. The self-constitution of agency would be considered a project to optimise relational agency, through which certain moral “truths” can be approached – however unstable they may be. The self-constitution of ecologically relational agency influences some changes in the environment, which modify, again, what will be possible in that self-constitution in the future. If normativity is defined in terms of the self-constitution of agency, as Korsgaard does, but in ecologically relational terms, the derived source of normativity seems partly external and, thus, in a certain sense real. The fact that the internal and external spheres of reasoning are co-active and mutually transformative implies that cognitive and affective elements cannot be strictly separable, as has been done in both traditional internalism and externalism. At least some aspects of the “external” world are “internalised” through mutual interaction. We could, perhaps, talk about “extended internalism” instead of opposing internalism with externalism. This would have further implications for the conception of moral motivation.

Constructivism seeks to offer a metaethical option for defending minimalist moral objectivity without applying the ontological and epistemological load of non-naturalist realism. However, its ability to offer distinctive moral semantics, its success at steering a middle way between metaethical realism and antirealism, and the tenability of its explanation of practical truths in terms of constitutive practical reasoning can be criticised.\textsuperscript{1068} I have argued that an ecologically relational perspective to moral activity makes a conceptual shift that may contribute to this discussion: constructivism would survive better as the metaethical framework for an environmentally plausible – perhaps slightly realist – ethical theory if the construction of moral reasons were considered to take place in the material, ecological and social construction of agency.

4.4 EMPIRICISM AND HUMANISM RELOCATED: SOME CONCLUSIVE NOTIONS

In this chapter, the task was to explore the implications of ecologically relational moral agency in selected naturalist and constructivist ethical arguments. Because the special interest is to investigate whether a relational shift would enhance a theory that would provide the grounds for environmental ethics, the commonly claimed theoretical requirements for a valid environmental ethics were taken as the starting point. A relevant theory should thus reconcile two contradictory requirements, both considered essential for an environmentally efficient ethical theory. First, the contingent conditions and contextual relationships of the agent should be acknowledged to have moral relevance in order for the concept of moral agent to be

\textsuperscript{1068} See, e.g. Bagnoli 2011, 18, 22, and Bratman 2012.
scientifically plausible and in order to argue plausibly for the motivation of actions. Second, the critical force and normative authority of ethics should be defended in order to make the theory efficient and morally binding. The former refers to metaethical constructivism, the latter to ethical realism.\(^{1069}\)

At this point I take a stance and suppose that if moral agency, which is the unit that provides the operations to perform moral actions, is considered to be constituted in an ecologically relational way and structured as a complex nexus, it can have implications when applied to an agent-focused ethics, and these implications are interesting from the point of view of environmental ethics. It is especially interesting that if the relational account of moral agency is a plausible view, it seems possible to apply it to both naturalist and constructivist ethical theories. And if the concept of agency can be successfully applied to both of them, by implication it strengthens the parallel aspirations of these theories towards understanding the dynamics between the environment and mind, and between causality and freedom of agential operations, issues that have been present in environmental discussions on each side. I argue, therefore, that reconceptualising moral agency has a potentiality to relocate the basic aspiration of environmental ethics. Instead of focusing on the moral status of nonhuman moral patients or trying to derive normative obligations directly from empirical explanations of ecological systems, environmental philosophers are called to consider the environmental dimensions of extended human mental operations and rationality. Such philosophers are called to evaluate cultural values and personal habits, as well as the ends and means of scientific practices, in the light of the development of sensitivity and care in the various relationships that are constitutive for moral agency. I suppose that this can be best articulated in terms of virtue ethics, to which I shall return in chapter 5.

Tension between freedom and nature counts among the fundamental problems for those who wish to argue for the authority and autonomy of ethics and, at the same time take seriously the empirically plausible notions of human naturality. Humanist environmental ethics has many strengths, but among its weaknesses is that empirical studies concerning human moral experiences and action sharply questions the notions of human uniqueness and freedom.\(^{1070}\) Empiricism accepts this, but its weakness is that its capacity to defend the autonomy of ethics and moral action is poor. These weaknesses reflect reflect the tension that is one of the central theoretical challenges for environmental ethics. Aspirations to overcome the tension by unifying the spheres of natural and moral agency by an appeal to ontological holism or Romanticism are common in environmental ethics.\(^{1071}\) Therefore, the direction pointed by Darwinian humanist Robert Kirkman is worth acknowledging: “environmental ethicists must avoid any conflation of human moral community with ecological relationships in the natural environment, and they must not seek to derive

\(^{1069}\) The latter are the central benefits of moral realism that the great majority of environmental ethicists wish to preserve, namely the authority of ethics and a critical point of view based on the autonomy of ethics.

\(^{1070}\) This is also acknowledged in the basically Kantian account of Darwinian humanism. Kirkmann 2009, 219.

\(^{1071}\) Much of the criticism and even underestimation of the environmental philosophy arises from arguments contenting themselves with easy solutions to this tension, which also often get a visible reception in popular discussions.
moral guidance directly from the promptings of natural sentiment”. As has become clear, the proposal of this study should not be confused with such a derivation. Instead, the question that has emerged during this work is whether these poles are properly located: is it “the human moral community” that is categorically on one side, while “the natural environment” is on the other?

According to Kant’s antinomy of freedom and nature, causality is a category for the experiences and understanding of natural reality as it appears to us, while reason is a category that pushes towards universal principles. While aiming towards universal moral principles, reason is faced with two metaphysical dogmas about causality: the empiricist dogma about unbroken chains of causalities and the rationalist dogma about the first cause(s) that begins new chain(s) of causal connections. Kant’s famous solution is to reject both as transcendental illusions and to argue that as the thesis and the antithesis of an antinomy they are both legitimate perspectives that do not offer as such access to the transcendent world. Kirkman’s proposal of Darwinian humanism takes these standpoints as constituting the irreducible ambiguity that is at the core of moral experience. But he argues that the separation between the standpoints of “the two worlds” of nature and freedom, as Kant puts it, implies great limitations for environmental ethics. According to Kirkman, “it is difficult to see what grounds there can be for a moral vision of harmony in the relationship between humans and our environment when that relationship is always dual”. But overcoming these limits by conflating the two types of relationships or just asserting their harmony would be, as he argues, a mistake that diminishes the ability to ever make justified claims for granting the environment the same moral status as humans have. However, the argument constructed in this study allows us to ask whether the options are restricted to two: separation or unification. If it is plausible to think – as it seems in the light of some scientific evidences – of something basically natural that makes it possible to call certain acts autonomous (“free”), although this something cannot be subjected to an individual human mind, a third option is defensible.

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1072 Kirkman 2009, 233.
1073 Darwinian humanism is a proposal for full recognition of an unavoidable, irreducible ambiguity of human experience in environmental philosophy: that “we are somehow able to experience ourselves as fully free and fully natural at the same time”, and neither standpoint can be held as representing the whole truth. Kirkman 2007, 17; Kirkman 2009, 217-19.
1074 Kirkman 2009, 219. For Kant’s view, see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (trans. W. S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett 1987), 176. Kirkman argues against the aspirations to unify causality and freedom by appeal to teleology, such as Hegel’s or Kant’s. Kirkman 2009, 220-33.
1075 Daniel Dennett, for example, argues for a naturalistic, and thus, non-transcendental account of freedom. He distinguishes between the physical level of freedom and the design level of freedom. The smallest components in a system may function causally, while at the level of systemic behaviour it is not necessarily so. According to Dennett, moral freedom connects these levels. On my view, Dennett’s idea of the system level of actions as designing more creatively could be explained in terms of agency as relational. Dynamics in between the components constituting the complex system of actions becomes creative (free) because these relationships as a mutually interactive influence in the social and ecological collectives act not just in one direction in time, but also backwards in time through memories, imagination and anticipation. For Dennett’s position, see Daniel C. Dennett, *Freedom Evolves* (New York: Penguin), 39, 48, 259. Kirkman does not, however, hold Dennett’s position as competent to overcome the tension between causality and freedom, and to thus reconcile empiricism and rationalism. Kirkman 2007, 15.
To conclude this chapter, some implications of the ecologically relational conceptual shift in naturalism and constructivism are worth summarising. The empirically supported notion of relationality means, among other things, first, taking a critical stance against the nativist naturalism about the relationship between the brain and consciousness, or physical objects and mental operationism. Instead of being purely causal their relationships are seen as mutually interactive. As an empirically notion this shift calls into question the dictating role of causality as the naturalist dogma. It calls for a relationally revised understanding of freedom and intentionality but rejects also the individualistic view of mental operations. Second, the mind is relational in the sense that it includes external bodily, environmental and social ingredients, and in the sense that natural relationships constitutive for agency have influences that are not reducible to physical causalities. Some philosophers and scientists talk about the mind extended into the environment, some about the enactivism of the mind and the environment, and some about the transaction between the organism and its environment. Third, relationality calls for accepting the Darwinian interpretation of human naturalness as plausible, which means that the human mental capacities used in moral reasoning differ from the capacities of nonhuman animals in degree, but not in kind.

The shift in the empirical stance towards moral operations provided by these perspectives has implications for both moral reasoning and moral rationality. Agency that extends to include even material relationships mixes factual causalities and intentional operations in a way that seems to blur a clear division between determined operations and free actions. This, again, implies that the categories of constructed and non-constructed realities, to which different premises of a moral argument separately refer, becomes vague. In the case of moral naturalism, the most important implications are the following: (1) Cognitive operations and reasoning as relational implies that the only possibility for moral deliberation and for approaching moral truths is included in the proper use of natural relationships that are dynamic and dialogical. (2) Moral rationality necessarily concerns also responsibilities for things that belong to the external environment in the sense that it is irrational to make a difference between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism in environmental ethics. In the case of constructivism, the most important implications of the relational shift in agency are, from the viewpoint of environmental ethics, the following: (1) The intentional elements in construction that are thought to provide the autonomy of agency are not absolutely free in the traditional sense. Instead, the course of action can change indirectly through the process of the constitution of the agency (which includes changes in the ecological and social environments). (2) Successful moral

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1076 The extended mind thesis argues clearly on the basis of cognitive science that mental operations include ingredients from the environment in the sense that agential operations are environmentally extended, not under one’s skin or in the brain. See e.g. Clark & Chalmers 1998; Clark 1998 and 2007; Chalmers 2018; Rowlands 2003; Rowlands 2009a and 2009b.

1077 Enactivism is a loosely used term but refers to quite a similar type of embodiment of mind than the extended mind thesis without defining the environmental constitution of mind, perhaps, in as strict a way, and to the mutually transformational interactions between physical and mental elements while organisms enact a world. See e.g. Varela et al. 1991; Johnson 1987; Lakoff & Johnson 1999; Rowlands 1999; Rowlands 2013.

1078 Transaction is a term arising from the pragmatist tradition, especially John Dewey’s philosophy. See e.g. Kivinen & Piironen 2013.
construction requires cultivating the conditions of autonomy and rationality, which implies that the environmental conditions, such as ecosystem services and partners of construction, need to be cared for. As can be seen, these implications represent a significant shift of naturalism towards constructivism, and of constructivism towards naturalism. Metaethically, they no longer seem to fit any hardwired positions. Some of the concepts in metaethical debates, such as the truth-aptness of moral propositions and the source of obligations call for redefinition.

If the implications of a relational notion of agency are carefully scrutinised, the concept of moral realism (or moral expressivism if one starts from that angle) also needs redefinition. For a realist position a relational shift implies at least two such points of conceptual clarification. They concern the normative authority of moral concepts and the included question of motivation, and the truth-aptness of moral reasons. Relational agency thus correlates with the questioning of common metaethical categories. Two heuristic means were used to explain how the two metaethically differing perspectives can be mediated into hybridity or compatibility: first, a conceptual distinction was made between actual and final moral reasons, and second, the non-conditional truth of moral concepts was located in the methodological issues by which the ecologically relational agency is constituted. In this sense, although each individual feature of moral agency can be relativised, moral agency as a whole cannot, because it is not reducible to any single faculty, but rather, the mechanisms and structures of being related are decisive in the sense that we can subject them to concepts like good and right.1079 Due to the non-reductionism included in relational explanations of ethics, even the use of natural (animal) agency makes changes in the world that have implications for agency in the sense that such acts count normatively. But besides this, relationally shifted ethical approaches from different origins can be seen to support a metaethically demanding, realist claim: the active use of agency can make the world better or worse, at least in some semi-objective sense derived from the functions of agency.1080

All this proves, in my view, that adopting relational moral reasoning can have theoretical and normative implications, besides explanatory clarification. If this argument is plausible, conceptual presumptions concerning agency play a powerful role in ethical theories. Therefore, these presumptions should be highlighted as decisive for the conceptual and normative plausibility of an ethical theory.

1079 Light 2000, 63; Rowlands 2005; Preston 2001. Actual moral reasons are influenced by the contextualities of reasoning, but this can also be vice versa: the reasoning process is influenced by operations resulting from actual reasons and influences, again, together with the involved external realities, in the self-constitution of agency.
1080 For example, Preston 2009, 184-5.
5 TOWARDS A RELATIONAL APPROACH TO ETHICS

5.1 INTRODUCTION: CHANCES AND CHALLENGES

On the basis of the previous chapters, it seems to be the case that adopting an ecologically relational notion of moral agency persuades theories about morality from both the empiricist and the rationalist side to draw closer. In this chapter I shall initially ask what could it mean for an ethical theory that wishes to take seriously those empirical, philosophical and anthropological evidences, on which the notion of ecologically relational moral agency has been constructed in this study. My special interest is, of course, in how such an ethical approach would locate one of the basic questions of environmental ethics, namely Why should I care about the environment? Many environmentalists would welcome a route that might reject both reductionism and non-naturalism but save the evaluative authority of ethics about better and worse. I argue that a relational approach can offer an option worth scrutinising. This study has already given some evidence to claim that an argument from ecologically relational agency gives more support to such a supposition than an argument from the modernist notion of agency. Although it is not possible to formulate an elaborated theory of relational ethics within the limits of this study, the idea will be initially sketched.

Ethics is usually divided into three distinctive fields: descriptive, normative and meta-ethics. Descriptive ethics as a field of empirical morality and meta-ethics as a field of conceptual analysis are separated from normative theories that are concerned with ‘oughts’: what should I do, and why should I do it? Therefore, the psychological limits of deliberation and action are recognised in terms of descriptive ethics: they concern the explanations of morality as a phenomenon. Normative theories, for their part, offer prescriptive principles and rules to direct moral actions, and construct justifications for calling certain reasons for actions moral reasons, while other reasons count as non-moral reasons. As a conclusion, moral actions are isolated from non-moral actions to the extent that seems implausible from the point of view of scientific facts about human operations, and narrows the focus of moral discourse to limited types of conscious, deliberated actions of individuals that are thought to be fully capable, average adult human beings.1081 Metaethical theories, then, judge whether a normative theory reduces normative concepts to moral (determined) facts or voluntary (free) choices, and whether the possible facts are natural or non-natural, or the possible choices are individual or collective. A key issue of debates at the metaethical level concerns, then, the source of normativity. One of the problems for

1081 The split between prescriptive and descriptive inquiries depicts a desire for clear moral guidance, urgently needed also in environmental ethics, but a few environmental philosophers are inclined to think that an aspiration to ensure certainty by simply detaching the moral ought from the contingent reality of the earth has side effects in which we can easily lose environmental guidance. See also Johnson 1998, 46-7.
any realist theory, entailing this categorising, is that it must explain the source of normativity of the moral facts as moral reasons, while, correspondingly, a problem for any expressivist theory is to avoid relativism by explaining the autonomy of ethics, that is, to explain moral reasons without reducing them to the emotional states of particular persons and power structures.

I argue that the relational conceptual shift calls into question some of the classical ways of categorising. An argument that will be concluded in this chapter claims that the relational conditions of moral reasoning question the idea of normative ethics restricted to the guidance of narrowly defined moral (deliberated, individual) actions. Ecologically relational moral reasoning pays attention to the non-descriptive implications of the factual states of affairs and life conditions. In consequence the sphere of actions that fall under moral evaluation should be extended beyond the sphere of individual free actions. There are moral actions in which the individual agent is not autonomous in the traditional sense when implementing an act. This restricted view of freedom implies that some of normative battles should be relocated in a way that they are considered to include even some propositions that are usually presumed to be factual premises. Implications of a revised idea of freedom and reasoning exemplify the difficulties to locate a relationally oriented ethical theory strictly into typical categories. As it is not possible to offer completed arguments for the the alternative in the given limits, the discussions of this chapter are aimed to encourage other scholars to engage in further discussion and to critically evaluate the initial ideas constructed in this thesis.

The relational conceptual shift turns the focus of an ethical theory towards agential capability. In moral terms, the virtues of agency seem to constitute the primary good for relational agency. For any actual moral system, moral obligations are explainable by virtue of agency; responsibility for the capability of moral agency involves then various other things. As agency is relationally constituted, this relies on the recognition of relevant different others. Obligations are, in a way, derived from the system of relationships – and as the system of relationships create the agency, the source of the obligation can be seen in the constitution of agency. Critical questions can, however, be posed to a relational theory, especially with regard to the normativity of relational virtues and the truth value of agent-based moral concepts. What makes moral agency an efficient, change-causing and critical activity, and why should we think that the content of agent-based moral reason is truth-apt? I argue that the answers can be partly derived from relationally shifted constructivism, while they are partly derived from relationally shifted naturalism.

It has been supposed in this study that actual moral cultures may develop in the sense of advancement through the practice of ecologically inclusive relational care. But to claim that this (or some) type of development is better than some other, supposes that moral realism is true. Since empirical relationality is a contextual concept, however, serious questions arise about the survival of moral realism.

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1083 Factual conditions for agency are, for instance, partly constructed by the normatively laden acts of moral agents (perhaps in a former state of agency construction). Some normative propositions may also be more fit and encompassing than some others in the particular world, while some factual conditions may be more sustainable than some others for the functioning of relational moral agency.
Although a relational approach is critical to common interpretations of realism, it seems justified to argue that a relational approach to ethics can be called, at least tentatively, relational realism.1084

In this chapter, I shall draw some inferences from the previous chapters to sketch the possibilities for a relational ethics. The most critical question for such an approach is how both normative authority, implemented in motivation, and the autonomy of ethics, implemented in the truth value of moral concepts, can be addressed to an ethical theory that involves the idea of relational moral rationality. A relational approach should offer proper solutions to avoid the following two threatening ends for any modest theory: reductionism lurking inside of naturalism, and relativism lurking inside of constructionism. In section 5.2, three discussions will be involved in order to sketch a possible track for a relational idea of truth value: Korsgaard’s neo-Kantian transcendental argument, John Hyman’s idea of knowledge as ability, and the virtue ethical perspective to moral truth. In section 5.3, the focus will be on the possibilities of virtue ethics as a ground for a relational approach to ethics. Martha Nussbaum’s capabilities approach will be emphasised in order to argue that relational agent-based ethics may sustain a naturalist type of relational moral realism. It will also be briefly asked how relational moral agency contributes to environmental virtue ethics. The aim here is not to complete the argument for a definite position of relational realism, but to start the discussion on its possibilities as a coherent philosophical position. An exhaustive argument for such a, as far as I am aware, new approach, would be the subject of another study.

5.2 TOWARDS A RELATIONAL TYPE OF CONSTRUCTIVIST REALISM

5.2.1 NORMATIVE RATIONALITY OF THE RELATIONAL CONSTITUTION OF AGENT

It has been supposed in this study that adopting an ecologically relational notion of agency is compatible with moral realism but challenges its robust version. To argue that the fundamental relationality of moral agency does not rule out realism means that ethics has at least (a) some ground to argue that moral concepts have non-contingent linkage, (b) some autonomy as a regulative conceptual system that is not reducible to the explanations of moral life and (c) some authority over moral agents that are somehow moved and motivated by ethics in the sense that ethics has some power of guidance. The authority of ethics is linked with valid explanations of the source of moral obligations. Admitting the constitutive role for contingent relationships of practical identity in moral rationality seems, at first glance, to

1084 The aim here is simply to start a discussion on the possibilities of a relational approach to ethics and its possible compatibility with moral realism rather than to complete the argument about relational realism as a definite view. An exhaustive argument for this, as far as I know, new approach would be the subject of another study.
undermine its authority. However, as has been seen in the case of Korsgaard’s theory, for instance, there are strong arguments for locating the source of normativity in the mechanisms of the self-constitution of agency. Instead of locating the source of normativity either inside or outside the subject, either in the individual (or social) legislative mind or in the reason, which presuppose such divisions to be strict, it can be located in the processes of interaction taken place in the extended agency. In the case of relational moral agency, the self-constitution is a subject of extended agency, which means that ecolological and biological causalities are involved in the constitutive rationality of the agent.

Claiming for the non-contingency of normatively committing obligations requires explanation of non-conditional normativity. Enlightenment philosophers such as Kant and Hume solved the problem of authority for non-relative ethics by basing the notion of authority either on shared moral rationality (Kant’s idea of the fact of reason as reflective) or shared moral psychology (Hume’s idea of common moral senses) – both referring to fixed humanity itself in one way or another. Beyond the contingencies that govern the actual reasons for action, a fixed point for the moral system lies, in their views, in the fact that all human beings belong to the unique party of humankind, which forms the moral community. This explains universal moral rationality and ground of evaluation in modern post-Enlightenment ethics. Since moral rightness and wrongness are internal to the world of human beings, features of humanity are thought to form the measure for the currency of judgements. One’s identity is one’s relation to humanity itself.

It has been argued – not only in this study but much more widely – that “humanity itself” requires definition, and the definitions given by Enlightenment philosophers involve suspicious presuppositions. The idea of relational agency shares elements especially with three approaches to the mind and agency currently under vivid ongoing discussion in philosophical anthropology: (a) the idea of the environmentally extended interactive mind, (b) arguments for enactivism (or transactional operations), and (c) the idea of collective agency, which has been here interpreted not just as restricted to collectives of human individuals. Each approach takes a critical position to modernist humanism and aims at an empirically plausible notion of human mental operations and agency. Since the relational shift in the

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1086 Korsgaard 2007a, 101.

1087 A view originally defended by Andy Clark and David Chalmers, and in a modified version by, for instance, Mark Rowlands. See Clark and Chalmers 1998; Clark 2007; Rowlands 2009a. The extended mind thesis claims “that mental processes have environmental constituents”. Rowlands 2009a, 60.

1088 Enactivism is currently much used as an umbrella term for various positions that usually respect the seminal ideas put forward in Varela et al. 1991 about the meanings of mutually active interaction for hybrid mental operations. See, e.g. Nöe 2004. Term ‘transactional’ or ‘transactional naturalism’ emerges from discussions appealing to John Dewey’s pragmatism. See, e.g. Kivinen & Piironen 2013.

1089 A view defended, for example, by Michael Bratman and David Copp. See Bratman 2007; Copp 2007a.
concept of agency blurs simplistic ideas of core humanity, such a concept becomes useless as the source of shared normativity.\textsuperscript{1090}

According to my argument, even some theories that basically echo Enlightenment traditions could apply to ecologically relational agency, and benefit from it. One justified way to argue for the authority of relationally constructed moral obligations could be based on Christine Korsgaard’s constructivism,\textsuperscript{1091} as she argues that unconditional obligations can be accounted for in terms of practical identity. Korsgaard disagrees here with Kant, who argues that it is a fact of reason, namely that the mind is reflective, on the grounds of which the account of unconditional obligation is possible. I argue that considering practical identity in terms of ecological relationality is compatible with and supportive of the option to exploit Korsgaard’s basically Kantian argument in favour of normativity (which is “humanist” in the sense that it is not derived from the empirical facts as they appear to us) without subscribing to the Kantian grounds for ethics in unique human reason.\textsuperscript{1092} Instead of emerging from individual or social reason, the relational approach to ethics claims that moral rationality emerges from an environmentally extended notion of reason.

This also holds true for the self-constitution of agency as the source of obligation: environmental constituents take part in it.\textsuperscript{1093} For a relational ethics, elements providing actual ‘oughts’ cannot be stable elements of human nature or social structure, but they may be cooperative mechanisms of the constitution of agency. The conceptual division between positions that argue for external ‘oughts’ (provided by “them” as the external facts) and positions that argue for internal ‘oughts’ (provided by “me”, the agent’s will or reason) are thus not totally separable from each other. As was argued in the previous chapter, formulation of the source of normativity for Korsgaard differs from the basic Kantian view, for example, with regard to the idea of moral autonomy. Instead of referring to the self-governance of an individual, moral autonomy refers to a modest relational autonomy that can be appointed to the agent that extends to eco-social environments. If so, normativity relies on the “the laws of

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\item Even the clear distinction between the traditional strands of post-Enlightenment ethics becomes blurred. For example, if reason (cognitive operations) and moral senses (conative operations) are, in fact, interwined in agency in such a way that they are not totally separable from the point of view of rationality, then the distinction between the philosophical strands in ethics based on Hume on the one hand, and on Kant on the other, should perhaps be reconsidered.\textsuperscript{1091}
\item Her view of moral agency is not straightforwardly relational, but it is open for ecological extension. The concept of autonomy also refers to aspects that can be defined through the relational features of agency. See chapter 4.\textsuperscript{1092}
\item It has been disputed whether practical identity can play such a foundational role or does an account of unconditional obligation require the fact of human reason as in Kant’s humanism. On my view, Korsgaard’s theory could benefit from focusing on the interactive operations of the mind. Environmental ethicist Robert Kirkman’s argument for combining Kantianism with the Darwinian notion of human being, which he calls Darwinian humanism, parallels to some extent Korsgaard’s aspiration to locate a revised concept of human in the Kantian argument. He concludes, however, that Darwinian humanism requires regarding the divided nature of moral action as fully free and fully natural. Kirkman 2007; Kirkman 2009.\textsuperscript{1093}
\item Agency is extended in a way that it has environmental constituents from its various, particular environments. This environment may include, for example, particular ecological conditions, social habits and practices, evolved bodily mechanisms, perceptions, aesthetic and other experiences, personal orientation and training.
\end{itemize}
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reason” that goes beyond the individual mind and embody environmental elements.\footnote{In my view, Korsgaard’s idea of the construction of reasons is compatible with the idea of autonomy as relational, if the active role of material and ecological parties in the relation to which the identity is constituted is involved. Korsgaard takes notable steps towards the relational construction of agency, according to my interpretation, including bodily interaction. Consider, e.g., this: “I must interact with the conscious inhabitants of my body, because I must act with my body. But I may also interact with other people, and when I do, then their reasons, as well as my own, become as it were incentives in the deliberative process that we undertake together, resources for the construction of our shared reasons”. Korsgaard 2009b, 200. Emphasis original.}

Kant emphasised the dignity of moral agents. He also derived the obligations concerning nonhuman nature (which may have analogies with the agent) from the obligation to preserve oneself as the moral agent: one’s moral duties concerning the environment are in fact duties to oneself. Moral agency represents dignity and one should preserve and cultivate it. The critique of reason led Kant to base ethics on the purified core of moral agency, namely the autonomous self. But the relationality of the self makes the picture of a fixed core unclear: the self is not isolated from its contingent contextualities. If the claim is plausible that it is possible to set a relationally revised concept of moral agency into a Kantian argument, the conclusion follows that agency, which is the primary source of normativity, involves ingredients from the external environment in terms of the extended subject of self-governance.

If correct, this is a practically interesting normative claim about norms for the environment. The adoption of relational agency makes a shift concerning the objects of responsibility, which means that the conception of agency has normative implications. Interestingly, these normative implications concern environmental ethics: moral obligations should concern the virtues of being in relation to various relevant others in order to construct moral agency. The obligation to care for rationality and moral ability implies maintaining and advancing sensibility, commitment and respect for material and biological others. By modifying the environments – landscapes, organisms and ecosystems – practical non-moral actions have moral status. The very conditions of moral rationality are connected to the factual relationships within material and mental ecosystems.

The relational constitution of agency as normative self-construction (to put it in Korsgaard’s terms) implies that there is a meta-normative level of obligations: the way one’s own agency is constructed determines what counts as the source of its actual obligations. An ecologically relational process of agency formation thus means, if it holds true, that the reasons that count as my own reasons and the meanings that count as meanings for me are relationally constructed in a particular, ecologically functioning nexus. Ecological processes are thus conditions of my normative self-constitution. The second level of normativity is, I think, illuminative, because at this point, naturalism clearly enters into constructivism.\footnote{In Korsgaard’s theory this reflects her transcendental argument. Korsgaard 2009b, 196; 1996, 136-145. For more, see section 4.3.5.} Second-level normativity emerges from the conditions and mechanisms of the self-constitution of agency: there are conducts that are necessary for the self-constitution of ecologically relational agency, which can be seen to have the status of universal normativity. The Kantian idea seems justified at this level: moral reasons should be understood as reasons for
all. Saying this, a relational explanation implies that in the actual situation everyone has a reason to promote one’s ability to reason through cultivation of the good for their agential partners.

Relationality clearly shifts the focus to the second level of normativity. The constitution of agency emerges through commitments (or as Korsgaard puts it, by the normative laws we commit ourselves to). The relational self-constitution of practical identity involves the external environment, to which we need to commit ourselves, on the one hand, and for which our obligations have factual implications, on the other. The reflective structure of agency (which is the source of obligation) is connected to the previous factual states of the agency and the quality of the relationships by which it was constituted. The actual process of the self-construction of agency influences the external others that will take part in the constitution of the agency at the next moment of time. Responsibility for those partners seems evident. Korsgaard subscribes the meaning of the meta-normative level of “transforming oneself” into the cause of moral activity: “To act is not just to cause an end, but to make yourself into the cause of the end, and so to make yourself into the kind of thing that achieves that end. To be an agent is to transform yourself into a certain kind of cause. The activity we exhibit in action is a kind of self-determined efficacy.”\textsuperscript{1096} At the second level of normativity, we can talk about the kind of “joint progress” or “joint corruption” of the partners involved in the construction of moral agency. There are thus some meta-normative environmental and social conditions for moral agency that are not dependent on actual partners or contingent environments. Actions in these relationships are themselves the means for practising the virtue of moral agency. I find this interpretation of the normative constitution of agency helpful for understanding the procedure by which moral conducts about environmental relationships can be approached.

What has been said opens up the question about the possibility of convergence between this kind of constructivism and naturalist virtue ethics in a relationally shifted mode. Moral abilities, such as empathy and solidarity, are partly given by nature, explained perhaps by evolutionary processes, but the nature from which these abilities emerge is partly constructed, or influenced (to use a more causal terminology), by the particular actions of agents. Applying relational agency means that normativity cannot be reducible to any actual natural feature rather than to the continuous process of completing agency by practising the relational mechanisms of moral agency. In a sense, the final goods for the agent do not precede the agent. Does this imply that a theory of human virtues should be replaced by a theory of the virtuous constructions of relational agency? I shall return to this in section 5.3.

The parallel lines of constructivist and naturalist philosophy have now taken a new stance in relation to each other. Neo-Kantian constructivism and neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics have approached each other’s positions through the revised notion of agency. In the constructivist view, natural facts need to be seen to be involved in the source of normativity through the relational agency – without lapsing into naturalistic fallacy. Seen from another perspective, natural facts as relationally active are, in fact,

\textsuperscript{1096} Korsgaard 2014, 197. Emphasis original.
such that it is relevant to talk about them as constructions – and this does not involve relativising what is good for the agents. It thus seems possible to argue that moral abilities enhance or degenerate through evolutive types of mechanisms, and they are influenced continuously by everyday practices that reflect the actual moral landscape and the capacities of agency.\textsuperscript{1097} If I am right, perspectives emerging from ecologically relational agency encourage ethical theories representing (realist or modestly antirealist) constructivism and (realist) naturalism to take steps towards each other in a way that appreciates the diverse processes behind both representation and expression. As relationally revised constructivism and naturalism parallel and approach each other, it is justified to ask whether they could have even some merging point. I argue that some insights about such a merging point can be drawn from their parallelisms in metethical discussion on the one hand, and practical environmental ethics on the other.

\section*{5.2.2 RELATIONALLY RATIONAL, MINIMALLY REAL}

Relativism threatens normative authority by denying the privilege of any particular moral judgement.\textsuperscript{1098} I argue that the claim can be rejected that naturally or culturally embedded moral reasoning would necessarily imply relativism. However, to argue that moral rationality is something bound to relational agency implies that the autonomy of ethics cannot be understood in an absolute way. However, I suppose that this does not rule out the basic purpose of realism. Defending moral realism means, according to the common definition, that moral concepts (1) refer to descriptive facts (natural or supernatural), the cognitive content of which is evaluative measurement, (2) are truth-apt and sensitive to the conditions of morality, and that (3) a morally qualified agent can evaluate the truth value of moral propositions.\textsuperscript{1099} The relational account of moral agency as a prerequisite for an ethical theory challenges the common interpretation of each condition. Despite that, I argue that a relational ethical theory can adopt, and even persuades us to adopt, a form of modest moral realism. The definition of realism needs, however, to be carefully worked out in order to argue for relational realism. Initially put, three correctives seem to be needed: (1) Moral concepts refer to natural or supernatural facts, which may have some cognitive meaning but are not necessarily describable in a non-conditional way. (2) Moral judgements are truth-apt, but this does not rule out a plurality of actual truths, which are compatible with the converging ultimate truth, although they do not necessarily correlate with the contents of the actual statements (though perhaps they persuade agency towards advanced moral knowledge), and (3) there are moral abilities by

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  \item \textsuperscript{1097} Korsgaard actually seems to be aware of the hybrid nature of the constitution of agency as the source of obligation when she writes: “Without respect for the humanity in your own person, it is impossible to will the laws of your own causality, to make something of yourself, to be a person; and unless you make something of yourself, unless you constitute yourself as a person, it will be impossible for you to act at all.” Korsgaard 2009b, 204. Certain similarities can be seen with Philip Kitcher’s idea of the ethical project. On this, see chapter 4.2.
  \item \textsuperscript{1098} Prinz 2007, 205-6. Prinz argues that moral progress is possible also in relativism, but it is generated by non-moral values rather than moral ones.
  \item \textsuperscript{1099} The former description is a modification of, for example, Moore’s view of realism, which modifies descriptions put forward by, for example, John McDowell and Hilary Putnam.
\end{itemize}
which a morally qualified agent can evaluate the actual truth value of moral propositions, but these abilities are not those of individuals or groups of individuals, or fully realised at any actual moment of time due to the contingencies of life.

From the agent’s perspective, the fact about mixed agential processes together with the fact that the practising agency influences and changes its structure and constitution and makes it reasonable to divide between the actual meaning of moral concepts – connected with the actual good for all – and the final meaning of moral concepts as some teleological aim for the constructions and development of agency. In each actual state of agency, then, moral rationality concerns the quality of actual interaction and the direction of changes. Realism does not require the actual privilege of any perspective. Various new forms of moral realists argue that moral realism does not require value absolutism. On the contrary, the partiality of the truth value of actual conducts is among the elements that make universal truth approachable by partial agents. The relational interpretation of a prima facie relativist statement and a realist statement are thus not as far from each other in regard to moral authority.\textsuperscript{1100} Impartiality does not concern the content of moral judgement but the way judgements are constructed in relationships between those having a share in agency.

The main difference between procedurally realist constructivism and substantive realism is how the problem of practical reason is identified, and what the role of the procedure is: a procedural approach offers a logic for solving moral questions, while the substantive approach applies moral facts to them. Both Kant and Rawls are constructivists, but their constructivism is justifiably compatible with realism.\textsuperscript{1101} A normative procedural theory focuses on the procedure. I argue that a relational approach to ethics can be seen to follow basically the same rules as Kant and Rawls, but the logic is different. The procedure of a theory that takes ecologically relational moral agency as the starting point would entail principles of the logic of relational deliberation. The function of concepts distinguishes constructivism from both substantial realism and antirealism. Truth-apt normative concepts have a practical function: they refer to whatever solves the problem, so they name solutions to practical problems rather than represent mind-independent reality.\textsuperscript{1102} Someone who defends a relationally realist approach does not need to object. However, compared to prominent ideas of procedural realism, the relational approach focuses on the level of virtuous mechanisms for balanced relationships in a moral ecosystem (of different kinds of ingredients), instead of political mechanisms, such as reflective equilibrium or other quasi-impartial contents.\textsuperscript{1103} The idea of moral truth must be carefully
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scrutinised, because not only does the meaning of moral terms vary from context to context so too do the representations of the truth-making object alter from context to context.1104 As a representative of moral realism, relationally considered moral concepts refer to something beyond particularities (whether they are psychological, cultural or ecological).

Moral rationality in an actual state of agency is bound to the constitutive relationships. Normative concepts in any actual state thus refer to truths that are somehow contingent. However, neither of the practised relationships determines what other relationships are recognised or what will happen at the next stage of agency. I suppose that the idea of limited autonomy of agency can be appointed to the hidden possibilities of the complex as a whole to either recognise or ignore, to focus on some while bybassing some others in the construction of one’s practical identity. Thus, the linkage of non-contingency may be located in the best possible ways to recognise all the relevant relationships in reflective mutuality. A relational theory of moral concepts should take two issues into account: First, practical identities are plural and change in time, partly through practical actions. Therefore, actual good or right must be distinguished from good or right in some absolute or final sense. Second, practical identities change to better solve practical problems by developing the function of agency, that is, the complex relationships that are constitutive for it. The functional structure includes relationships in both social and material environments. Therefore, conceptions of good and right can be addressed in an actual situation to the function of the webs concerning the involved partners and the way in which they mutually interact. The chain of constitutions of agency may take different directions. Whether some direction of development is better than another in some objective sense is a question which relational ethics needs to answer.

I argue that applying relational moral agency to either naturalist or constructivist ethics can sustain modest realism in each in the sense that they trust in the possibilities of ethics to guide us. This comes especially clear by the fact that they carefully deny every type of drastic reductionism: relationality undermines reductionist explanations of moral concepts and actions for moral reason by denying that any one definable reality (whether physical, psychological, evolutive or social) survives alone as an explanatory reality.1105 But at the same time explicating moral

nature. See Palecek and Risjord 2013, 9-11. In this sense, it is not clear what is “internal” and what is “external” to culture or to nature.

1104 Compared to Hilary Putnam’s internal realism, relational realism is more closely connected to truth-making objects. For comparison, see e.g. Wolfgang Künne, “From atheistic anti-realism to atheistic realism,” in James Conant and Ursula M. Zeglen (eds.), Hilary Putnam: Pragmatism and Realism (London, New York: Routledge, 2002), 144-165, and Hiroshi Ohtani, “Putnam’s Moral Realism,” Bulletin of Death and Life Studies 7 (2011), 176-96. Although interpretations of Putnam’s internal realism vary from relativism (e.g. Künne 2002, see above) to non-metaphysical realism (e.g. Ohtani 2011), his view about the truth-aptness of moral propositions remains, I think, unconvincing. The key idea in his realism, according to Ohtani, is that judgements can be evaluated and corrected by judgements about their truth “in an idealized epistemic condition” (Putnam 1981, 55-6). The problem for this kind of non-metaphysical realism is how can we know that we are in an idealised epistemic condition. This easily leads to an infinite regress argument. The problem may be solved by adopting a Kantian notion of a regulative ideal, which would mean adopting the idea of “the ideal of human moral flourishing” (Ohtani 2011, 190).

1105 No single faculty can explain moral agency. Therefore, claiming that each individual feature of moral agency can be relativised does not necessarily entail that moral agency as a whole can be relativised. Light 2000,63; Rowlands 2005; Preston 2001.
agency as ecologically relational (combining physical and mental webs) involves that at least some of the differentiating issues between moral realism and antirealism becomes unclear (such as the gap between conceptually constructed and factual realities to which the moral concepts refer in the constitution of agency). For instance, because of scepticism towards absolute freedom of will and impartial reasoning, the definition of moral reason differs from traditional realism.

The relational constitution of moral rationality leads to the construction of a metaethically modest position, perhaps a hybrid one. Actual moral claims are constructed in relation to the real world.\footnote{1106} Moral concepts that refer to the agent, such as virtue and vice, refer then to the quality of these real relations, not to essential humanness, cultural commonality or shared awareness.\footnote{1107} The interrelatedness between “internal” and “external” reasoning makes a theory hybrid in the sense that it acknowledges both expressive and representational elements in moral reasons. While metaethical midway theories usually locate the core aspect of moral agency in either cognitive or non-cognitive operations,\footnote{1108} the relational approach locates it in the interactivity between the “constructed” and “constructing” elements: cognitive content as the object of knowledge and the expression of the subject are not clearly separable although the conceptual difference remains. Reduction to either expression or fact does not make sense. If expressions and cognitive contents are outcomes of operations in which cognitive and non-cognitive elements are interwoven, moral goodness refers to something that is not clearly either “real” nor “constructed”. Instead of referring by moral concepts to either (cognitive) content or (conative) expression, they can (if they are connected to the agent’s perspective of any kind) refer to the logic of interaction and cooperation between them. Addressing moral concepts just to one or another would imply that they escape from earthly moral agents, who cannot divide them.\footnote{1109}

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\footnote{1106} Both modest realism and soft expressivism are compatible here, but in light of the subjects dealt with in this study it seems more plausible to conclude a relationally minimal realism. An agent is related to the world through, for example, natural needs, cultural entities, personal experiences, landscapes, religious beliefs, etc. Compare this to David Brink’s and Richard Boyd’s semantic way of constructing new wave realism and to the functionalist solution developed by Putnam. In cultural anthropology, the interest in this kind of relationality is called “an ontological turn” within the field. See Palecek and Risjord 2013.

\footnote{1107} This certainly makes the question concerning Cartesian scepticism relevant: If I am what my webs make me to be, how can I trust anything? But while Descartes ended up in dividing between the \textit{inner} awareness, “the core of the moral subject” as the source of certainty, and the \textit{external} world of uncertain (moral) objects, the relational approach chooses another way: As I am part of the web with the external world, hope for (moral) truth lies in this very web.

\footnote{1108} The environmental ethicist’s sympathy for quasi-realism (for example, Philip Kitcher), error theory (for example, Michael Ruse), or neo-sententialism (for example, Kate McShane and Fritz Allhoff) arises especially from their worry about the scientifically plausible nature of moral agency. For example, environmental ethicists who draw from evolutionary psychology very seldom want to adopt the reductionistic naturalism that is favoured by many non-environmentalist evolutionary psychologists, and choose modest antirealism instead.

\footnote{1109} Alan Holland has provided perhaps the most apt criticism against relational approach on moral reasons in the context of environmental ethics. He distinguishes between different kinds of reasons and argues that internalist account of reasons to act are worth defending in order to provide practically efficient environmental ethics. However, Holland’s target is in holistic relationalism and it does not consider relationality of the mental processes. On my view, thus, relational agency has a potentiality to undermine the dichotomised discourse on internalism and externalism. See Holland, A. 2016.
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Despite the fact that dichotomising objectivism and relativism has been criticised for decades,\textsuperscript{1110} alternatives seldom focus on the organic nature of human agency, or the implications of the environmental extension of cognitive operations.\textsuperscript{1111} Considering ecosystems of intimate relationships as central for the agential definitions of moral concepts (either as solutions for practical problems or as facts about the final good of the agent) opens up a new route for this discussion. On this route, contingent conditions of moral reason do not rule out the critical authority or autonomy of ethics, or not even some objective point of view. Moral rationality “for all” can be defended, because measures for the quality and mechanisms of the best interaction are the same for all.

The threat of relativism is a challenge to be explained out for constructivist realism. A coherentist notion of moral truth is not seen to be compelling enough. I argue that the conditions of reasoning located in (real) ecosystemic structures support constructivist arguments for modest realism.\textsuperscript{1112} In contrast to the usual procedural methods that seek an impartial set of instructions, following which the practical problems would be correctly solved at any situation,\textsuperscript{1113} relational “procedures” focus on virtuous relatedness, in which ecological and physical others are acknowledged to contribute to the process of construction. Moral languages or narratives to which a constructivist theory may refer are not isolated but are heavily interwoven. The idea of truth as such refers, however, to the method rather than content.\textsuperscript{1114} Justifications internal to each narrative are bound to the metanarrative about the relatedness of viewpoints. This has implications for normative justification, too: actual justifications may be partial and, at the same time, parts of the nexus of narratives connected

\textsuperscript{1110} Richard Bernstein, for instance, argued famously against dichotomising objectivism and relativism in the spirit of hermeneutical and pragmatist philosophy (Bernstein 1983). According to him, what is subjective should be seen as organic parts of objectivity on the ground of human shared experience of life. The dichotomy results from a misplaced borderline between the subject (who holds the moral judgement) and the object (the real moral property to which the judgement refers). Bernstein claims that the problem of modern ethics lies in the fact that truth-making conditions are restricted to the side of the object. He defends a kind of subjectivist realism, which is a little closer to universalist realism than Hilary Putnam’s internal realism: on the side of subjects, there is something (albeit non-essentialist) on behalf of which subjectivism should not be condemned for relativism. The truth is guaranteed in pluralism by the structure of the subject and her experiences, the subject’s sociability, or the communication between the subjects.

\textsuperscript{1111} Environmental philosophers’ sympathy for quasi-realism (e.g. Philip Kitcher), error theory (e.g. Michael Ruse), or neo-sentimentalism (e.g. Kate McShane and Fritz Allhoff) arises especially from their worry about a scientifically plausible view of moral agency.

\textsuperscript{1112} It is worth acknowledging here that relativism, too, has different interpretations. Unlike ethical relativism, circumstantial relativism, for instance, is a realist position: the moral rightness of a particular action or certain practices is relative to the facts about the agent, such as her skills and knowledge. This is compatible with the existence of truth, even though beliefs that are justified in a certain context do not have foundation in that truth. The regress of justification does not end in firm (epistemic) foundations, but neither is it endless in a way that the only justification left would spring from the coherence of a finite set of beliefs. See Timmons 1996, 296-7.

\textsuperscript{1113} A minimalist constructivist realism most usually appeals to some procedural stance to the truth. But procedural mechanisms defined by the structures of society (such as a liberal society for Rawls) or individual non-relatedness (such as freedom for Kant) are not valid for relational agency.

\textsuperscript{1114} Truth-aptness is, therefore, not only “internal” to the particularity of the moral landscape but can cross particular moral traditions through the encompassing mechanisms. Compared to Hilary Putnam’s internal realism, then, a relational notion of truth is not restricted to language but is factually embedded in a way that partly crosses cultural limits. Cf. Putnam’s Representation and Reality (Cambridge, London: The MIT Press, 1988) and Realism with a Human Face (ed. J. Conant. Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1990).
together by the mechanisms of the functioning nexus of narratives. The ecologically relational notion of moral rationality may thus help in overcoming the dichotomised discussion on justification. Or, at least, it is an option that deserves further examination.1116

In the case of naturalism, reductionism remains an issue worthy of critical discussion. An elucidative perspective on the implications of a relational shift to naturalism is to see how it influences the evolutionary debunking arguments, according to which scientific naturalism debunks the entire idea of ethics as conceptually irreducible to random empirical facts.1117 The environmental ethicist William FitzPatrick criticises the evolutionary debunking arguments by arguing that they rely on a fundamental disconnection made between evolutionary forces.1118 He argues, and I agree with him on this, that the roots of this disconnection are in the supposition that properly moral capacities cannot be natural, naturally evolved and trainable.1119 But while FitzPatrick worries that a naturalistic approach (which he thinks does not strictly posit the existence of clearly irreducible evaluative facts) may lead to “undesirable compromises in our understanding of the objectivity and normative force of ethical facts and properties”,1120 I argue that the problem of debunking arguments is that they are reductionist and are grounded on implausibly simplistic explanations of moral agency. The same seems to hold for FitzPatrick’s worry: he seems to equate naturalism with reductionism, which reflects a narrow view of naturalism, connected with his conception of moral agency. On the grounds of this study, it is justified to argue that the Darwinian idea of the naturalness of genuine

1115 For instance, epistemologist Susan Haack argues for an idea called foundherentism, which might give notable support to the argument constructed in this study. According to Haack, contextual knowledge is not exhausted by the isolated narratives, but together with the empirical foundations, coherent narratives can justify knowledge. The dichotomy between foundationalism and non-foundationalist cohercism is thus overridden if the focus is on how contextual narratives are mutually interrelated. The justification of beliefs is not unidirectional, and therefore, it is possible to talk about justification without foundations. The main reason for Haack to argue that there is a third option for justification besides foundationalism and cohercism is that they are both unnecessarily grounded on an unconvincing view of human rationality. See Haack 1993, 73-94.

1116 Relational agency, at least, holds that rationality is tied with the cognitive states of the agent, but these states necessarily neither subjectively nor objectively reflect the outside world. This gets support from externalism defended by cognitive scientists, such as Alva Noë, Andy Clark and David Chalmers. According to this view, cognitive states interact with the outside world and depend on the use of symbols and things external to the body. Noë 2004, 220-21; Clark and Chalmers 1998. The idea of “active externalism” about the vehicles of content of experience owes a debt to Ludwig Wittgenstein (The Blue and Brown Books, Oxford: Blackwell, 1958) and relies on Daniel Dennett’s conceptual distinction between content and vehicle externalisms (Consciousness Explained. Boston: Little, Brown & Co, 1991). According to Dennett, it is not possible to read off the properties of vehicles of cognitive operation from the resulting cognitive content. Clark and Chalmers add that the vehicles loop out of the head and brain into the world.

1117 See, e.g. FitzPatrick 2015.

1118 FitzPatrick 2017, 6-7; FitzPatrick 2018, 551. FitzPatrick defends moral realism in its robust form and non-naturalism about moral concepts.

1119 “If proper appreciation of human dignity, for example, requires the right kinds of emotional development and training, rather than just familiar extensions of reasoning as in mathematics, then our ability to gain moral knowledge related to human dignity depends on our having been given the emotional potentialities and dispositions that were necessary for us to be able to develop characters capable of engaging with such moral properties as dignity.” FitzPatrick 2015, 904.

1120 FitzPatrick defends a “worldly” non-naturalist view founded on basic reasons (such as human dignity). The options for him are either to choose naturalism and “give up on robust objectivity or categoricity and settling for less”, or defend irreducible normative facts based on basic reasons, the status of which does not rely on contingent facts. FitzPatrick 2018, 554-5.
moral capacities is compatible with a nonreductionist type of modest moral realism without reduction. The important job for philosophers who wish to debunk the debunking argument would thus be, in my view, to properly articulate a concept of moral agency that does not rely on non-natural “moral features” as the requirement for moral reasoning. Debunking arguments are inefficient if they do not appeal to non-naturalism concerning moral capacity. A relational conception of agency can thus make a difference.

However minimalist a realism is, it indicates cognitivism of some sort. At the same time, a relational understanding of agency casts suspicion over the traditional division between cognitivism and non-cognitivism.\textsuperscript{1121} Resistance to the contradiction between cognitivism and non-cognitivism can be defended from both naturalist and constructivist origins.\textsuperscript{1122} Hybrid approaches that mix realism and expressivism also illustrate the blurring division between cognitivism and non-cognitivism.\textsuperscript{1123} Cognitivists and expressivists do not necessarily disagree that moral utterances are truth-evaluable, but for expressivists moral sentences express non-moral beliefs as part of the secondary meaning of moral terms. An expressivist can still choose between three positions concerning the content of moral beliefs: moral utterances are seen as either expressive of descriptive assertions, non-cognitive attitudes or commands, or non-descriptive beliefs.\textsuperscript{1124} According to David Copp's metaethical hybridism, for example, the basic substantive intuition of expressivism does not involve antirealism, since the meaning of moral terms is not reducible to either descriptive or expressive elements.\textsuperscript{1125}

Modestly realist metaethical views of constructivism and naturalism can be distinguished from classical realism, for example, on the grounds of their theories of normative concepts. Korsgaard describes this, correctly I think, by arguing that moral realism was given a new, narrow meaning in the twentieth century as it was closely connected with a reductivist account of the content of moral concepts. The mainstream theory of normative concepts in the twentieth century originated in the shift of debate between empiricists and realists from “a view about the sources of our concepts to a view about their contents, about how they are to be analyzed”. As moral language was closely connected with the verificationist theory of meaning, according to which, “a concept’s content is given by the way its application would be empirically verified”, questions about the possibility of empirically verifying the applicability of moral concepts were raised. As a result, moral philosophers came to doubt whether moral concepts can have cognitive content at all, and doubts raised against moral

\textsuperscript{1121} It is worth noting that relational criticism against simplistic or reductionist explanations of moral action and the resulting criticism against detaching (moral) knowledge from (moral) action is anything uncommon. On the contrary, it concurs with the wide contemporary criticism. See, for example, Hyman 2015 and Tolksdorf 2011. See also John Hyman & Helen Steward (eds.), Agency and Action (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press 2004).

\textsuperscript{1122} Korsgaard 2003, 105-6. Korsgaard argues – on behalf of Kantian and Aristotelian constructivism, at least – that contrary to the mainstream, such forms of constructivism have the ability to resist the contradiction between cognitivism and non-cognitivism, and therefore, to offer a basis for a modest realism beyond that contradiction. They have this ability by virtue of their theory of moral concepts.

\textsuperscript{1123} Schroeder 2009, Copp 2009b, Kitcher 2013. For Copp’s view, see section 4.3.3.

\textsuperscript{1124} According to this last position, defended especially by Mark Timmons, moral beliefs have evaluative, but non-descriptive content.

\textsuperscript{1125} Sinnott-Armstrong 2009, 252; Copp 2009b. See also Sinnott-Armstrong 2007.
realism in particular. The line of debate was cemented between the realists and the rest, and wide range of “non-cognitivist” proposals were developed. In contrast to such a narrow interpretation, a relational naturalist, for instance, would argue that moral concepts refer to natural states of affairs, but they do not represent certain states of affairs. Concerning moral knowledge, such a view is sceptical towards representationalism. Cognitivism does not require that the contents of moral concepts are empirically verifiable. A relational approach to ethics holds actual normative concepts to refer to the principles of the relational logic of practical reasoning. Although the contents of actual moral concepts are plural, they are thus not analysable as “mere expressions of sentiments”.

If it is plausible to talk about a relational theory of ethics, it seems possible to defend it as a realist approach which includes an account of moral concepts that refer to facts about (the function of) agency, but these facts combine natural and constructed elements. Normative concepts do not represent stable features of reality, but they name the relationships that are required for solutions to practical problems, such as eco-social harmony. Just to state that practical philosophy uses reason to solve practical problems is not practical enough to guide ecologically relational agents. The method of solving practical problems should not bypass the fact that all reasoning is relational, and hence, environmental conditions influence what can be seen as the problem. The construction of agency through ecological relationships is conceptually prior to human reason. A relational realist would then argue that morality can be seen to be progressive in the sense that moral norms develop over time. This resembles, in certain features, what a Kantian constructivist, Onora O’Neill, argues to be a view of modestly realist constructivism, and an evolutionary ethicist, Philip Kitcher, argues to be a view of modestly realist naturalism. But the development of actual moral norms is not the result either of natural factors (Kitcher) or of rational revisions of self-scrutinising reason (O’Neill) alone; it results from the ongoing practising of relational virtues that combine both aspects. The virtue of relatedness and collaborative togetherness include, for instance, recognition, listening and respect for others, together with whom/which reasoning must be practised. In consequence, the agency changes and relationally autonomous reasoning expands to wider levels. But this is all connected to the real world – the evolutionary and ecologically structured earth – and normative concepts can approach the truth over time.

Martha Nussbaum’s capabilities theory seems, on the grounds of what has been said, an interesting option for developing a relational approach. It exemplifies a non-essentialist virtue ethics, in which the genuine possibility of practising human capabilities works as the actual measurement for evaluating virtue. Human capabilities are not, however, absolute. They change by (virtuous or vice) practising of agency, that is – if the relational formation of agency is accepted – by cooperating (virtuously or viciously) with others in agential ecology. It is only this kind of actual goodness that can serve as a measure for actual agents, although each actual good is

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1126 Korsgaard 2003, 104.
relative to the constituents of a certain agent. This demonstrates an important
metaethical feature of the capabilities approach: it accounts for mixed positions
rather than objectivism. The capabilities of a relational agent rely on the actual
constitution of human agency. In consequence, the proper mechanisms of
constituting a well-functioning moral agency are central to what counts as good. This
involves a non-traditional view of moral realism. I shall briefly return to Nussbaum
in section 5.3.

If the argument developed in this study is plausible, constructivism and
naturalism in ethics – although they arise from opposing philosophical traditions –
both have something to offer a relational ethical theory. Instead of placing them in
opposition to each other, a relational approach to the nature of morality supports the
idea that the source of obligation cannot be reduced either to nature (empirical facts
as determining what is good) or to construction (human freedom as the legislative
law) alone, since normative legislation entails a creative interactivity between them.
Therefore, the actual state of moral truth can be imagined as separated from the ideal
state of moral truth, which means that the actual truth is always a construction, but
through the ideal mechanisms of being related to the functions of moral agency,
constructed concepts can be claimed to be truth-apt in the ideal sense of truth. In this
study, the relational approach to ethics is then considered to be a form of moral
realism, albeit a modest one.

5.2.3 APPROACHING TRUTH THROUGH AGENCY

However minimal, a truth condition is required in order to count as an approach to
moral realism. While according to representationalists, there must be a way to judge
which of the conflicting propositions is true or closer to the truth, an agent-derived
truth condition does not, however, concentrate on the content of propositions. It has
to do with the method of evaluating what kind of agency would end up to the best
statements, rather than the statement itself. A practical moral ability changes with
time: moral agency evolves (in terms of naturalism) or develops (in terms of
constructivism) due to the collaborative process by which the agency of a particular
being is constituted. The direction of this constitution is, thus, decisive from the
objective point of view. In actual situations, therefore, neither an absolutely true
moral statement nor an actualised perfect moral ability (of any existing being or
group) is required in order for the practical moral judgement to face some truth
condition. Practical moral judgements can have truth-aptness as judgements
concerning the means of moral flourishing of ecologically relational agency.

The truth value of moral judgements does not necessarily refer to the
propositional truths. True moral judgements may express something that results
from what is appropriate for a particular set of well-functioning relationships. As such
it is not, however, a subjective attitude, but is instead an objective process from the
viewpoint of those taking part in the agency. This is, I think, clearly exemplified in

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1129 Some objectivists argue that Nussbaum’s concessions to relativism take her approach too far
from realism. If, however, Nussbaum’s position is examined through a relational notion of agency, its
realism is better sustained.
Korsgaard’s way of combining features of Aristotelian and Kantian philosophy in agential constitutivism. We need to commit ourselves in constructing “a state of affairs that is, as far as possible, good-for us all”, because without doing that we cannot construct ourselves as moral agents. Such a need is a fixed feature of “better”, based on the natural structure of the world, which in itself is not, however, fixed. This supports the existence of transcendent truth. Korsgaard defends a constructivist reason for using the concept of “good simpliciter, and not just of good-for this or that person or animal”. Commitment to an unknown good simpliciter is here needed in order for the ability to construct better moral judgements to emerge. It works as the content of hope in order for us to take steps that can lead us towards the truth. According to Korsgaard, we could use Kant’s idea as a criterion for constructing the good itself, in the final sense: “‘Good’ then, is the schematic name for the solution to the problem of shared ends.” However constructivist this claim is, the self-constitution of agency can and, perhaps, should be located in time, namely in evolutionary and social history, and in place, namely in the ecological conditions and structure of the earthly life. What is then left as the unconditional good, can be seen to concern the interrelatedness between beings and things in space and time.

If this is a plausible interpretation of Korsgaard’s view, it supports the basic idea of relational realism, with the distinction that Korsgaard’s definition of good refers to agents as individuals, while relational realism would define agents as ecologically relational. According to relational interpretation, agents who construct themselves as moral agents by committing themselves to the construction of a good state of affairs, form a flexible, relational unit, sometimes even a collective agent with collective intentions. This seems to make the idea of Korsgaard’s argument ever more powerful: Without constructing “a state of affairs that is, as far as possible, good-for us all” the others of “us all” cannot function in the best possible way to improve the agency that we construct together. Even when defined through the “problem of shared ends”, the common good is embedded in the state of affairs of the environment. The ends we can imagine, not to even talk about the means available for us to reconcile various ends, deeply depend on a nexus of environmental relationships: these relationships are constitutive for the agency we regard as our own agency.

In agent-based theories of ethics, at least, the relational construction of agency refers to the dynamic process of moral development through continuously reshaped agency. This implies that the cognitive contents of moral propositions cannot be truth-apt in the sense of traditional representationalism. From the relational point of

1130 See Korsgaard 2016. This interpretation leaves it open, however, on what criterion a contribution to the way the world is counts as morally right. But if adopting ecologically relational agency, the idea of Kantian moral autonomy becomes relationally chastened and ecologically embodied in a way that makes the conception of moral truth relevantly approachable through the correct practising of the mutual relationships between partners that together constitute relationally autonomous agency.

1131 Korsgaard 2013, 43. Referring to Kant, Korsgaard thinks that “[w]hat we are to call good must be an object of the faculty of desire in the judgement of every reasonable human being”. Kant, Critique of Practical Reason (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5: 61. Cited in Korsgaard 2013, 43.

1132 Korsgaard 2013, 44.

1133 It is worth reminding ourselves here that the relational definition of collective agency does not require, however, a definition of collective agency put forward by collective intentionalists such as Raimo Tuomela and Michael Bratman. Neither should it be confused with the idea of weak collective agency, based on collective harm or collective self-interest defended, for instance, by Elizabeth Cripps. See Cripps 2013, 39. For more on collective and relational agency, see chapter 3.
view, the idea of representational truth value does not serve objectivity but static definitions of moral concepts. In contrast to aspiring to static definitions, the relational conceptual framework calls for a dynamic self-understanding of ethics: ethics is something that compels agents to ever better self-construction in order to strive for an ever better understanding of moral concepts – although their meanings always remain uncertain in the actual situation.

Such a conception of ethics emphasises virtuous dynamics and directedness rather than epistemic certainty or representational truth. This does not deny the truth-aptness of moral propositions; they can be truth-apt in the sense of the second level of truth, teleological in sense, which can in fact only be considered procedurally. While John Mackie’s error theory or Michael Ruse’s fake realism claim that there are reasons (although not necessarily moral, but practical or, perhaps, evolutionary reasons) to believe that actual moral claims can be true, from the relational point of view it seems that there are moral reasons to be sceptical about any claimed actual moral truths that are put in propositional language. But at the same time there are moral reasons to commit oneself in a particular way to the interactions through which (via the development of the nexus of agency) the actual truth can be constructed to approach the final truth that remains transcendent. Actual agents do not necessarily have access to that goal, but actual moral conducts can be evaluated in the light of their ability to reflect appropriate procedures.\textsuperscript{1134}

The criterion for measuring the better or worse construction of agency needs to be in line with the procedures for approaching coherence of all the mutually intertwined functions at a certain moment of evolutionary history, and with the procedures of preserving and advancing the ability to commit to them. An awareness of the environmental relationships on which our deliberation and intentions rely is thus not only central for moral ability but also for the measures of good. The outcome we get from a relational collaborative process of agency, such as moral deliberation, depends on which parties we recognise, pay most attention to, listen to, to which things we give space, and which things we trust.\textsuperscript{1135} The objects of the epistemic process also emerge to be what they appear to be for the reasoning agent partly through them being related with each other and efficiently participating in agency.\textsuperscript{1136} According to a relational view, beliefs as acts and representations as states of affairs that match the contents of beliefs with what exists are thus not isolated from each other, as was supposed in both traditional internalism and externalism. Beliefs and representations are constitutively related. Commitment to the appropriateness of the relations that constitute moral agency can be seen as moral virtue – just as commitment to the

\textsuperscript{1134} Although truth remains transcendent, it might have a potentiality to attract as a hope: Correctly practised sensitivity in the agential nexus maintains and advances practical moral identity through becoming more inclusive. Hence, the ability to solve practical problems is developed, which attracts us and calls us to follow its course.

\textsuperscript{1135} The contribution of any object in any cognitive relationship amounting to representation is also up to the subject’s actions. This comes close to ideas defended by such environmental philosophers as Lorraine Code, Mark Rowlands and Christopher Preston. See Code 2006a; Rowlands 2005; Preston 2009.

\textsuperscript{1136} The influence of our relation on others then concerns not only its meaning for us, but also the way it exists – or will exist – as “an object of knowledge” is also influenced. See e.g. Clark and Chalmers 1998.
world can be seen as an epistemic virtue. Such virtues are, in turn, related to the correct contents of given beliefs or judgements.

A relational approach to the mind and moral agency that refers to ‘extended internalism’, instead of mutually opposed internalism or externalism, has both epistemic and motivational implications. Ecologically relational moral agency covers those “inherently normative and motivational entities” that Korsgaard has argued exist in the form of “people, and the other animals”. Relational mechanisms of the construction of agency then means that those others on which our agency partly relies, and whose existence partly relies on our practices, can, roughly put, both “tell us what to do” and “make us do it”. If Korsgaard is right, as I suppose she is, uncertainty or scepticism about objective values does not entail antirealism. On the contrary: realism is right in that there are extant entities that meet the dual criteria of providing both direction and motive. They can be addressed to ideally functioning structures called ecologically relational moral agencies. The actual evaluative standard can simply refer to the method of constructing the ideal constitution of the nexus of recognition and attention: it is objectively the best way to approach the truth, however transcendent as such it is. This method can be described in terms of virtuous relations and collaboration.

The nature of moral truth in relational realism could be roughly summarised by two notions: (1) the truth can be approached on the basis of the ideal constitution of relational agency, and (2) any actual approach to moral truth is necessarily partial, because the agency to which it is connected is ecological by nature. Therefore, a realist ethics concerns the method rather than the final, descriptive contents of the moral truth. The truth escapes all grasps not only because it is internally intertwined with the totality of contextual (contingent) facts, but besides that, because it is also bound to the totality of those facts in the future reality of the morally advanced, ideal agency, in the construction of which we take part.

One can still wonder whether relational realism is just a form of coherentism. I do not think it is. However, if truth refers to a moral fact, a distinction must be made between the actual truth referring to the actual moral facts connected with the construction of practical identities for solutions in the case of the actual non-moral facts of reality, and the final truth referring to the transcendent moral facts about the ideal direction of the relational processes. Objective truth is an ultimate aim that remains transcendent without ruling out the possibility of improving the (epistemic or) moral ability to approach it gradually. At each moment, particular truths can participate in the one by representing certain ways of being related that enhance the approach to truth. Hence, truth can on the one hand be many, and on the other hand

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1137 Korsgaard 1996, 166. Definition of the source of normativity requires an idea of identity, but it does not necessarily restrict the identity of an agent, however, to an individual identity under one’s skin. The operations of reflection are decisive, and may, in fact, be relational operations of agency, involving various living and non-living entities, materials, landscapes and cultural bondages as constitutive of one’s identity.


1139 This kind of theory would, I think, be more firmly a realist one than, for instance, Nussbaum's theory.
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be one.\textsuperscript{1140} In the ideal situation, eco-social mechanisms generate the moral agency function optimally in that eco-social situation: inclusive, active and reflective interactions playing perfectly their roles in reasoning. The hint of objective truth in an actual situation can be understood to refer to the attitudes provided by such ideal agency.\textsuperscript{1141} In actual morality the normative focus is thus on what can be done in order for particular eco-social environments to remain powerful to endow us with moral competence.

If we separate actual/contextual and non-contextual ethical truth, as proposed here, the nature of ethics appears to be somehow teleological: the continuous moral constitutions of agency aim at truth as their \textit{telos}. Unlike the usual notions of teleology, however, the aim is not to be derived from the essential nature of the agent (in the Aristotelian way) or teleological unification (in the Hegelian line of thought), but from the ideal way of constituting agency in relation to everything else. Dialogical relationships between particular perspectives are a means for objectivity. This requires qualified interaction, by which all partners of knowledge formation are respected, wondered about, trusted, and taken responsibility for. It is thus due to the mechanisms of relatedness realised and practised within eco-social webs whether moral competence and the ideal of moral flourishing is enhanced or degenerated. In this type of “procedural realism”, objective truth escapes, but hints are hidden in collaboration aimed at advanced mutuality. To put it in Kant’s terms, the truth of a proposition lies in the ways it is reached, that is, how agency is constituted, realised and practised.

Relational agency is compatible with the neo-Kantian notion of regulative ideal. Moral judgements need to be continuously corrected, because the ideal of the final good requires us to seek for an enhanced constitution of our own agency – the ideal of moral flourishing – in order to make more comprehensive judgements about that good. Unlike Kant, however, a relational view underlines that moral flourishing relates to the earthly world. Relational autonomy, in which “external” reality is involved, directs the further constitution of agents and their future capabilities. A regulative power for developing agency is generated in real relationships. In this sense, the relational approach is compatible with both neo-Aristotelian naturalism and neo-Kantianism. If the reflectivity of agency provides normative authority, moral judgements cannot be justified without the complex earthly interactions in which the (self-)reflection takes place.\textsuperscript{1142} Inner diversity ensures that the structure of agency

\textsuperscript{1140} For a relational realist, a moral statement is actually true when certain relationships hold between mutually coherent “states of mind”. Internally, this refers to the commitment with all relevant partners in agency, and externally, to the proper expression of provided knowledge. Moral knowledge understood as an ability connects the concept of truth with the processual nature of relational agency. This has a fundamental impact on the method of searching truth. See e.g. Hyman 2015, 164.

\textsuperscript{1141} In this sense, moral truth is expressive. For some, this may seem like an ideal observer argument, but in my view, it is not. The main differences concern the content and timing of the moral truth. From an ideal observer’s point of view, the cognitive contents of moral propositions are truth-apt regardless of the context, while for a relational realist, truth-aptness concerns the way of relatedness in order to formulate actually appropriate moral statements and, besides that, enhance agency in order to achieve higher levels of moral capabilities.

\textsuperscript{1142} Korsgaard 2007a. Korsgaard does not, herself, argue for a clearly relational account of ethics. She develops her neo-Kantian idea of normative authority based on the \textit{form} of self-consciousness in the direction that suits a relationally extended view of the reflective “self”. See Korsgaard 1996, Korsgaard 2007a, Korsgaard 2008, Korsgaard 2009a, Korsgaard 2009b, and Korsgaard 2014. To me, there is
can function as the basis for reflection.\textsuperscript{1143} The moral aim for an individual is to
develop her agency to be ideally inclusive for approaching objectivity and being able
to act accordingly (good at). Such a situation ensures, in turn, the final good for the
joint agent.

The idea of truth-aptness connected to the quality of relationships, and denial of
the reduction of moral concepts either to descriptive or expressive analysis, is
included in several minimalist and hybrid ethical theories, such as David Copp’s.\textsuperscript{1144}
Simple representations fail. The truth condition refers, hence, neither to a descriptive
nor an attitudinal element, but their coherent mutual relationships in the agent.\textsuperscript{1145}
The truth value of actual normative principles concern their reference to the relational
logic of practical reasoning. A hybrid position that wishes to defend realism could, I
suppose, take advantage of the ecologically relational notion of moral agency. While
minimalist theories of moral truth take sides with regard to naturalism and
constructivism (by locating the criterion for the good either in natural facts or social
meanings), in a relational approach they are interwined. In a view I wish to call
relational realism it is a factual prerequisite for morality that biological, physiological,
psychological, intellectual and moral processes are mutually conditional.

The role of the principles of relationality for the truth condition has been
emphasised both in naturalist virtue and care ethics, and in neo-Kantian and hybrid
constructivism. Applying relational agency seems to push each further to the edge of
its original metaethical position and strengthen included shared ambition to
represent a modest or mixed metaethical view. A relationally constructivist view
would argue that the procedure for judgement specifies the function of practical
rationality. But although moral judgements are conclusions of practical reasoning,
the ideas of rationality, freedom and autonomy should not be taken as
unconditional,\textsuperscript{1146} which draws the view towards naturalist realism. A relationally
naturalist view would argue that moral concepts refer to natural things, but do not
represent any particular state of affairs.\textsuperscript{1147} Despite being complex, I argue that the
approach to moral truth that a relational conceptual shift supports as most plausible,
is a naturalist one. The difference between constructivism and realist naturalism is
not, however, very clear in this context. As Carla Bagnoli states, they share a promise
that there is “objectivity without the epistemological and ontological costs of non-
naturalist realism”.\textsuperscript{1148} A relational approach might enhance this promise.

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[1143] This can be compared to the idea of “strong objectivity” in feminist standpoint epistemology. See
e. g. Harding 1991, 142-49.
\item[1144] For example, David Copp’s pluralist hybrid realism by and Mark Schroeder’s hybrid, or
“tempered”, relational expressivism. Copp 2009b; Schroeder 2013. Copp’s hybrid theory combines, as
has been discussed earlier, naturalism and expressivism. See e.g. Copp 2009b. In earlier writings,
especially “Explanation in Justification and Ethics,” \textit{Ethics} 100 (2): 237-258, 1990, he calls his ethical
naturalism “confirmation theory” rather than “moral realism”. Defined by Virginia Held, “(c)onfirmation
theory […] holds that moral theory can be empirically confirmed”. Held 1998, 76. Among others, Copp
questions the division between relativism and realism. I agree with him and add that although the
division remains a conceptual one, it does not have as strong a practical relevance as is usually thought.
\item[1146] For more detailed reasons, see Bagnoli 2011, 17-8; Korsgaard 1996, 2008, 2009b, 2012d; Copp
\item[1148] Bagnoli 2011, 17.
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Towards a relational approach to ethics

I have here argued that moral concepts constructed in an actual moral system can be directed towards the truth, but the only way to evaluate the truth value of actual moral judgements concerns the changes they entail in the relational construction of moral agency, and its ability to solve for better or worse the practical problems of relationships it is constituted by. Modestly thinking, the truth-aptness of a moral concept does not require that any of its actual definitions represent absolute truth. Moral concepts may refer to the method of constructing better normative systems as the correct direction. I argue that the currency of a moral code derives from the truth about the ideal method of constituting agency reflected by the relational interaction, instead of the propositional truths represented in the contents of those codes.1149 The ideal constitution might be different in another context (since the particular partners are different), despite the uniting method. The point of evaluation possible at any actual point of time can at best concern the way in which moral agency is constituted and developed.

5.2.4 KNOWLEDGE AS ABILITY AND EPISTEMIC VIRTUES

The relational account of agency implies that if there is objectivity for moral goodness, it cannot be derived either from the external facts or expressions of legislative reason alone, but in the way it refers to both: it concerns the mechanisms of the interaction of the constituent elements of the agency, which means that it is not achievable purely either by reason or by emotion. As a premise of a moral argument, relational agency brings with it a widened concept of responsibility, including responsibility for the ecological, evolutionary and social structures of the constitution of agency. This means that the descriptive and prescriptive operations of agency are deeply intertwined. Actions normally considered to be morally trivial can have significant external impacts, via the environment, to our very agency and rationality. This does not involve the reduction of ‘ought’ to ‘is’,1150 defended by ethical empiricists, but neither does it involve their separation. Despite the fact that the actual constitutions of agency and the norms they legitimate are in certain sense relative, the measure of good mechanisms of interaction carry with the non-relative element. The cooperative partners of agency should be related in a way that their transactional impacts enhance rather than degenerate the various agential functions (collective and personal) emerging from the particular interactions.

If there is a measure for good and right in a relational interaction, how does one approach knowledge about it? If the argument for relational agency is sound, it calls for a revised conception of knowledge, too. The only possibility to acquire knowledge – factual and moral – is either despite or because of the relationships they live by and act in. The ethical theory that adopts agency dependent epistemology allows that truth-apt normative principles do not necessarily converge. This does not, however, exclude the idea of the non-contingent moral truth, which can be reconciled with the

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1149 Compare David Copp’s society-centred ethics, in which the content is also truth-apt. See, e.g. Copp 2013, 125-8.
1150 The view according to which ‘ought’ derives from what evolutionary psychology and cognitive science empirically prove to be natural for us to desire.
actual plurality by reference to the functions of relationality. One aspect here is that moral rationality requires a particular ecological and social historicity in order to be of any use for moral deliberation.1154 There is not only one “human way” beyond plurality of perspectives (and we should not even hope for that, because relationships are dynamic). A plurality of perspectives as such carries with it hints of truth, but they are hidden in their relations rather than in their contents. If relational rationality is accepted, actual disagreements concerning the particular contents of propositions are real rather than just disagreements of taste. People in different environments may not come to totally convergent conclusions about what is “wrong” by the standards that any actually appropriate normative system can offer for them.1152 But the plurality of actual truths does not rule out a justified hope for approaching convergent objective truth. In order to approach this truth, however, the focus should be directed towards relational virtues rather than the justifications of any belief-like statements. Non-conditional truths cannot be acquired as states of mind. They can only be approached through the search for ideal recognition and respect for everyone and all that counts. Moral ability should be preserved and cultivated.

A few philosophers have recently critically questioned the epistemological myths based on the modern but currently scientifically implausible conception of human agency. Among those I make use of two, a virtue epistemologist Margaret Olivia Little and an epistemologist and philosopher of mind and action John Hyman. They both consider knowledge in terms of skill of being in relation to the known. According to Little, knowledge is linked with the way the object of knowledge is recognised and “listened to”.1153 Hyman argues that knowledge is an ability rather than a form of belief.1154 In the light of relational moral agency, the truth-aptness of moral concepts refers then – in addition to some other things, perhaps – to the practical care for the relations of the agency itself. Sensitivity to the conditions of morality and the virtuous practising of relational reasoning have a normative status. In spite of being agent-related, normative obligations are connected to the factual world through the nexus of agency. Hence, we are talking about a kind of “constructivist” metaethical view that modestly counts as “naturalism”. Proponents of such a view can discuss with both

1151 The pragmatist philosopher Sami Pihlström interestingly argues that it is, in fact, relativism that implies the possibility of a neutral point of view. This is because according to relativism, moral right is “relative to a choice of moral framework”. Formulating the relativist view thus requires a morally neutral point of view, which is, however, implausible. Therefore, Pihlström argues, Putnam’s view, for example, can be seen as incompatible with moral relativism. Pihlström 2005, 33.

1152 Nussbaum, for example, while referring to capabilities as depicting human flourishing, needs to note that any list of human capabilities is just a proposal, and that capabilities are contextually bound. A relational notion of human agency would open this conception of capabilities even more – humans in different eco-social locations are nearly like members of different species: their contents of flourishing do not converge. But despite this, the capabilities approach interpreted from the perspective of relational moral agency would, I suppose, accord with moral realism better than Nussbaum’s view does.

1153 Little 2007a, 263.

1154 See Hyman 2015, 159-90. Hyman argues that “knowledge is an ability or skill” and claims that this idea “transforms the task of defining knowledge”: “[instead of asking] what we need to add to belief to get knowledge, we are forced to ask how knowledge gets exercised or expressed, since this is invariably how abilities and skills are defined”. Hyman 2015, 164.
cognitivists and non-cognitivists, because they consider that the cognitive and non-cognitive elements of reason are mixed.1155

Ecologically relational agency calls into question a dichotomised understanding of objective (evidence-based) and relative (intention-based) moral knowledge, which has famously seen to divide between ethics and epistemology. It has been thought that any ethical theory that does not accept non-naturalism with *a priori* access to moral facts, should rely either on a-posteriori knowledge based on evidenced natural facts (such as human flourishing) or on desire-based social constructions that may provide procedures for the truth (such as discourse or reflective equilibrium). In contrast to this, relationality calls for an epistemic agency that constructs new types of connections between facts and desires. Relational agency dissolves the strict contradiction between naturalism and constructivism: if the justification of moral reasons and the construction of moral concepts were located in the level of agency construction – instead of reducing it to natural features or raising it to interpersonal relations – a plausible alternative to both could emerge. This may call into question the common understanding about the distinction between natural and moral epistemologies, too: perception and reasoning may have similar mechanisms that should be acknowledged in order to use them successfully.1156 The conception of human activities have depicted the dualism of human nature throughout modern moral philosophy, traditional Kantianism and utilitarianism alike: the division between spectator and actor has been strict, and access to empirical facts and to moral justification has been based on different poles.1157 At this point, ecologically relational moral agency questions the modernist project: agency that generates normative authority being ecologically relational questions the separatedness between free and determined actions, as well as between the individual mind and its surroundings.1158

If different dimensions of human agency are relationally intertwined in moral reasoning, moral reasons are achievable only through practising this complex agency. A plausible conception of knowledge should then acknowledge also that knowledge and action are intertwined. The traditional description of knowledge as a true, justified belief has been challenged by theories that connect knowledge with theory of action. Such theories often claim that knowledge is not something to be stated, but

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1155 Consider, for instance, Susan Haack’s epistemological argument called foundherentism: she argues for epistemic justification through the combined use of empirical and narrative methods. See Haack 1993.
1156 Historically speaking, while modern moral philosophy appreciated the empirical approach to natural knowledge and denied the metaphysical one, it supposed another type of epistemic activity in regard to moral knowledge, namely intuition and voluntary regulation. The normative justification invoked universal, essential, and inherently normative features of human nature: freedom, consciousness, rationality, autonomy, intentionality, will and impartiality. As moral beings, humans are thought to be independent from their own empirical matters of fact about contingency and embodiment in order to have access to the moral realm. Epistemic activity is thus divided or dualist.
1157 Essentialism concerning human agency did not disappear as a consequence of the Kantian criticism of pure reason. On the contrary: while cutting off the capacity of actual human reason to achieve transcendent moral truths, Kant concentrates the whole method of achieving the truth on the concept of autonomy, based on individual freedom, and appoints this unique, eternal feature to all moral agents as qualifications for them counting as moral agents. Modern naturalism, too, is grounded on voluntary capacities: desires, preferences and will.
1158 Kant insists that we should act as if we were autonomous, even though we do not know it for certainty. However, the split entailing this emphasis has strengthened in philosophical discussion positions according to which the most plausible realist ethical theories advocate non-naturalism.
something to be achieved by certain types of action. Especially four types of epistemologies may be of conceptual help here: virtue epistemology,\footnote{Especially virtue responsibilism, defended by Lorraine Code, neo-Aristotelian epistemology formulated e.g. by Linda Zagzebski, and virtue reliabilism defended e.g. by Ernst Sosa. Sosa 2000.} theories arguing for a conception of knowledge as a skill,\footnote{See Hyman 2015 and Conceptions of Knowledge. Ed by Stefan Tolksdorf (Berlin Studies in Knowledge Research. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011).} environmentalist epistemology\footnote{Rowlands 1999 and Rowlands 2006.} and place-connected epistemology.\footnote{Preston 2003, 2005 and 2009. The last two focus on the role of physical and aesthetic experiences and practised relationships in the cognitive process. Each theory offers a valuable insight into the relational definition of moral realism. Although epistemological and moral virtues belong to conceptually separate categories, theories concerning the former are also appropriate candidates for a theory about moral knowledge.\footnote{Conceptual connections with early feminist social epistemologies about situated knowledge are also common. Haraway 1988; Hartsock 1998; Harding 1998.}} Partly overlapping with each other, these theories connect epistemology with the philosophy of mind and action, and often also with ethics according to the definition of knowledge.\footnote{In this sense all foundationalist theories, coherentialist theories (such as Rawls’s theory), and moral contextualist theories (such as the one defended by Mark Timmons) are traditional approaches. See e.g. Tramel, “Moral Epistemology,” in Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2005, http://www.iep.utm.edu/mor-epis/, accessed 4.7.2010).}

Hyman, for instance, argues that the nature of knowledge should be distinguished from that of belief, because the former is ability, while the latter is a statement.\footnote{Hyman 2015, 152-64.} Such a formulation transforms, I argue, both the idea of reason to value knowledge and the understanding of how knowledge can be evaluated. The conception of moral knowledge does not remain untouched in such conceptual revisions. Theories of moral epistemology that question or revise one or more of the central aspects of traditional realism (cognitivism, epistemic necessity of justified true belief, epistemic internalism, and priority of epistemic structure) are called non-traditional approaches.\footnote{The most interesting form of non-reductionist naturalism from the viewpoint of relational theory is the non-traditional cognitivism defended by neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists like Martha Nussbaum and others. The question that remains open here is, how well do the given theories succeed in defending it? John Alexander finds this perspective crucial for the neo-Aristotelian theories: “the attractiveness of Nussbaum’s theory crucially depends upon the possibility of a non-reductionist understanding of human capabilities”. John M. Alexander, “Non-Reductionist Naturalism: Nussbaum between Aristotle and Hume,” Res Publica 11 (2005): 157-183. See also Little 2007a.} Reliabilist, relationalist and neo-Aristotelian epistemologies, as well as relationalist approaches all count as non-traditional approaches. They also make an effort to naturalise moral epistemology without reducing the justification of a moral belief to any description about either physical or social reality.\footnote{Relational realism calls for an even more naturalistic and pluralistic view than most others. It could be epistemologically classified as a form of (virtue) reliabilism, instead of representationalism.} The position sketched initially here as relational realism shares much with this discussion and takes part in it.\footnote{Relational realism calls for an even more naturalistic and pluralistic view than most others. It could be epistemologically classified as a form of (virtue) reliabilism, instead of representationalism.}

According to virtue epistemology, knowledge requires objects of knowledge being involved in the epistemic process by adopting a virtuous attitude towards them: the relevant “informants” need to be acknowledged, paid attention to, and trusted. As they become proper parts of the epistemic process, they contribute to the generated knowledge in an active way, increasing the reliability of knowledge. Therefore, better knowledge results from better interaction: the method for truth is bound to the
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agent’s attitude towards all the relevant objects of knowledge that take part in the truth-searching epistemic process, and in functional communication. The better “cared” (given space to contribute) the others are, the better the resulting knowledge represents them. Taking agency as essentially relational, the more participants contribute to the formation of its identity, the more reliable the knowledge to which he has epistemic access is. Reliability of knowledge, thus, relies partly on the attitudes and skills of an agent, partly on the number of the participating elements in the nexus in which the process takes place. Without benevolent welcoming, important partners may be ignored.

Hyman binds knowledge as ability more strictly to the facts that it concerns. Knowledge is “the ability to be guided by the facts, in other words, to take the facts into account, in what we think or feel or do”. He emphasises the difference between knowledge as an agent’s ability or skill, and belief as an agent’s disposition, and thus, their very different natures. According to Hyman, “instead of asking what we need to add to belief to get knowledge, or how knowledge can be acquired, we are forced to ask how knowledge gets exercised or expressed, since this is invariably how abilities are defined”. Through exercise, which is practical activity taking place in some factual context, an agent has a way to be guided by the truth. Knowledge differs from belief also in relation to truth. It is normally thought that the truth value of a belief is to be intellectually evaluated: it is thought that in order for a belief to be counted true (“knowledge”), we need to point out that it is true and justified. But knowledge and true belief are not the same; “the truth of a proposition is not a true proposition”. The object of knowledge is “the truth of the proposition that p” while the object of a belief is “the proposition that p itself”. The value of knowledge, compared to justified true belief, is that it offers a method of achieving the truth.

Knowledge as an ability requires cherishing the skill of being guided by facts, not keeping a certain state of mind. And being guided by facts requires cherishing the ability to be aware of and respond to the particular facts of the situation, that is, to have such a relationship with the facts that they have the role of a guide. This is, according to Hyman, what makes knowledge: “the knowledge-involving explanation cites (or purports to refer) a fact about his situation that he was aware and responded

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1168 Hyman 2015, 162.
1169 This differentiation is stricter than those made before, for example, by feminist virtue epistemologists. Hyman 2015, 164.
1170 Hyman 2015, 208-210. The categorical difference in definition is influential, for “it is possible to know that p without being able to produce the correct answer to the question whether p”. Hyman 2015, 165.
1171 “For we not only care about what we do, and think, and feel, we also care about why we do it, think it, and feel it, and we want our deeds and thoughts and feelings to be guided by the truth.” Hyman 2015, 209. Although Hyman’s view is a radical one, and there are more modest versions of a similar idea, I find it helpful, since it shows that a justified true belief is not comparable with knowledge, because they belong to different categories.
1172 “Of course, a traveller who merely believes that Larissa is due north, without knowing it, can take the road that leads north on the ground or assumption that Larissa is due north. […] But doing an act on a ground or assumption is different from being guided by a fact, and one cannot be guided by a fact one does not know, any more than one can follow a guide one cannot see.” “If the traveller sees the guide taking the left fork and follows him, then he is guided by the guide; but if he hallucinates him taking the left fork, and takes it himself for that reason, then he is not guided buy the guide, even if the hallucination happens to be true”. Hyman 2015, 208-9. Emphasis original.
to, whereas the belief-involving explanation merely refers (or purports to refer) to his state of mind”. 1174 If we follow Hyman, the task of moral epistemology is not to describe the moral facts but to show actions to make ourselves able to be guided by good and right. If, thus, the truth is not a proposition, the ultimate truth of an actual statement cannot be justified or falsified by intellectual deliberation. Truths are evaluable through the abilities they produce when contacted.

This kind of epistemology supports some initial ideas about the relational theory of ethics: First, the way to achieve knowledge (understood as an ability) is through situated actions in which the agent is aware and responds to the facts of the situation. Moral knowledge should not be conceived as something to be stated, like beliefs you can adopt or not, but as something received by doing good things and offering in turn the ability to be guided by ultimately right things. These things are external to an individual mind. Second, moral knowledge is bound to the nature of agency. Actions by which we respond and are aware take place in the constitution of agency. Third, the truth can be expressed only through action. Having moral knowledge causes actions guided by the right. Since being guided by the truth means being guided by knowledge, some truth is included in the knowledge, however partial that knowledge is. 1175 A correct expression of a moral truth is an ideally practised ability or skill to be guided by what is right – which refers to the correct constitution of agency. Fourth, knowledge is gradual due to the deed: it can be weaker or stronger in a sense that we have this ability to greater or lesser extent. The truth by which we seek to be guided is not changed, although it is intimately expressed in the situated action in which the ideal constitution of agency takes place. 1176 Each expression of morally correct action in a particular situation realises something about the truth, and further enhances the ability of moral knowledge.

Applying the idea of knowledge as ability to Korsgaard’s theory implies that good for a moral agent, namely her relational ability to practise moral reasoning, generates moral obligations. As knowledge is an agent’s ability to produce the correct outcome by practising certain (virtuous) activities in the nexus of various active (and is not an outcome), these activities are essential for moral reasoning. Moral ability is something that one should have and cultivate. Everything that carries any valuable perspective from the viewpoint of the issue in question must be responded to as a partner in the epistemic process. The epistemic ability of a particular agency remains partial, but the better the interaction, the more truth it involves. Virtue is, thus, tied to arranging favourable conditions for fruitful interaction and collaboration. To put this in Nussbaum’s terminology, virtue is tied to the idea of promoting the capabilities of a relational moral agent.

1174 Hyman 2015, 209.
1175 “Seeking the truth is seeking knowledge,” and “being guided by the truth is being guided by knowledge,” because “we can be guided by the truth, as long as we know it.” Hyman 2015, 210.
1176 The difference between knowledge and true belief does not concern the truth – which thus could be achieved also through a lucky assumption. The difference is in the value of the ability to be guided by the truth. “So if all we cared about was getting to Larissa, we would not, or at least should not, prefer knowledge to mere true belief. But if we wanted to be guided by the truth, then we are bound to value knowledge above true belief.” Hyman 2015, 209.
5.3 VIRTUE AND THE ECOLOGICAL NATURE OF HUMAN CAPABILITIES: STEPS TOWARDS RELATIONAL ETHICS

5.3.1 VIRTUE AS AN ECOLOGICAL DISPOSITION AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

A relational approach to ethics seems to involve elements from both relationally oriented constructivism and virtue naturalism. What has been said about the implications of an ecologically relational concept of agency in the idea of normativity – as connected with the constitutive self-governance of the nexus of relational operations – and in the realist idea of morally better and worse – as not strictly connected to the representative truth value of moral propositions, but as agential development – resembles, of course, virtue ethics. Therefore, I suppose that virtue ethics can take most advantage of the relational account of agency.\textsuperscript{1177} The question in which relational agency makes a difference compared to Aristotelian or other common virtue theories concerns, however, the criterion for moral enhancement toward virtuousness in any actual situation. Instead of connecting virtuousness to the essential human nature of the agent, as Aristotle did, the criterion of a move toward virtuousness at any actual moment can be derived from the methods of constructing the nexus of relationships for the agency. Taking this line of thought, which is, I think, justifiable, would then philosophically locate the idea of relational ethics to the position sometimes called alternative virtue ethics.\textsuperscript{1178}

At the level of normative ethics, the parallel agendas of naturalist and constructivist environmental ethics, described in chapter 2 and analysed in the light of ecologically relational agency in chapter 4, seem to share the key idea that the ability of moral agency should be cultivated in order to handle environmental problems. Both lines of thought have thus stepped into the sphere of virtue ethics. These approaches ask what does it mean to be responsible for the future of the conditions of morality. However, the traditional answers of virtue ethics do not satisfy them.\textsuperscript{1179} What, then, would be required for an appropriate account of virtue for

\textsuperscript{1177} An interesting further challenge for me or someone else would be to develop a systematic theory of ecologically relational virtue ethics, which cannot – unfortunately – be elaborated within the limits of this study.

\textsuperscript{1178} Michael Slote calls them non-Aristotelian agent-based theories. See Slote’s \textit{Impossibility of Perfection} (2011). I find it especially interesting that Slote argues for “transpersonal dependency of a virtue on a good and of a good on a virtue” and that “personal good transpersonally depends on someone’s else’s good and other cases in which a virtue in one person depends on the existence of virtues in others”. For instance, friendship “involves not only reciprocal relationship, but also a reciprocity (or mutuality) in the good that each derives from the fact or reality of that close and mutually caring relationship”. Slote 2011, 109-11. Emphasis original. In line with this, Slote concludes his work by referring to the relational dimension of not just virtues but also goods. According to him, it is worth further work with “the idea of dependent values”, which means that “our profiling of the virtues ought to have a relational dimension in addition to the more familiar internal one”, and it is “plausible to suppose that such profiling should be applied to goods and not just virtues”. Slote 2011, 126-7.

\textsuperscript{1179} The problem of virtue ethics is often considered to be that morally justified action can only be formulated by referring to how a virtuous person would act in a certain situation. This implies that virtue as a character trait is a permanent disposition, and usually also bound to an essentialist ontology. According to standard virtue ethics, virtuous actions do not amount to a virtue, but a relational account of agency blurs this view: it can be justified to argue just that. In this sense, the concept of care could
environmental virtue ethics if ecologically relational moral agency was adopted? It is not among the tasks of this study to formulate practical normative environmental ethics, but since the proposed conceptual revisions as such seem to direct the formation of normative ethics, it is worth briefly considering them in the case of virtue ethics. The basis of virtue disposition can be interpreted in different ways. It can be located inside the agent as a feature connected with the agent’s harmonious life from the point of view of his life as a whole: virtue benefits (real) human flourishing. Or it can be seen outside the agent in the harmonious function of the society or environment (in relation to which the virtuousness of characters of an individual can be evaluated): virtue benefits flourishing of the collective. Metaethically, the individualist interpretation represents classical realism, while the collective interpretation relates the basis of dispositions to relative contingent factors. Compared to them, the relational approach offers a third interpretation: the basis of virtue disposition is located in the mechanisms of the flourishing of the constitution of relational agency, which combines internal and external elements.

The common interpretation of Aristotelian virtue ethics is that its realism relies on essentialism. However, if it is possible for an Aristotelian ethics to accept that the nature of moral dispositions is relational and consider mental operations as environmentally extended, this would not be the case: dispositions can partly be based on environmental factors. Attributing dispositional features to an object is then based—in addition to the internal traits of the object—on the mutually responsive relationship between the object and the external world. Virtue cannot thus be satisfactorily justified by permanent character traits nor by the agent’s total life but is always partly grounded on the communicative relationship between the agent and the outside world. This interpretation also makes a virtue theory cross the classical metaethical categories. However, dividing agent-derived bases from communicative bases does not represent a relational view. A problem for virtue theories concerns the action-guiding element, namely, specification of a virtuous agent, which easily blends in with the deontological view. To avoid this, a virtuous agent can be specified via the specification of virtues, for instance in the way Rosalind Hursthouse does. According to her, the specification of a virtue as a character trait in standard neo-Aristotelian ethics, according to which “virtue is a character trait a human being needs for eudaimonia, to flourish or live well”, fails to be action-guiding. A relational notion of agency may contribute to this challenge: a “virtuous agent” that consists of mutually connected ecological and social niches implies that there can be a certain way of relatedness that provides the best possible flourishing for each actual constitution of agency and its environment. Virtuousness would thus be included in implementing the virtuous mechanisms of relatedness at the level of the constitution.
of their agency. The difference between the virtuous and the non-virtuous agent would then include elements that connect these different agents. This connection, however, is not just in the dialogue between two individuals, but in the complex cooperation that provides agency. It can be realised and practised for better or for worse.

If the notion of agency proposed in this study is plausible, virtues can be defined as ecological dispositions. As such they contain also external elements. Therefore, evaluation of a person’s disposition should concern the character of a person in relation to his environmental actors, together with which any character is elementally generated. Instead of being permanent trait of an individual or feature of occurrence, moral character is bound to take shape in practical situations through the actual beliefs, wishes, imagination, physical and biological abilities and ecological awareness of both the individual and his close community. If we stop here, however, the proposed virtue ethics would be left slightly to the relativistic side, and that is not the point. For a relational agency, environmental actors are not determinants but internal partners of agency, and thus, partners in virtue, as well. It depends on the environmental situation and the external partners of mental operations whether the moral insight can or cannot take real advantage of the collaboration with them. It is thus part of virtuousness to take care of the ability of environmental partners (or “ingredients”) to enhance moral ability. Moral responsibility for one’s virtuousness includes responsibility for all those that influence one’s character traits. Attention should be paid to the traits or dispositions that have the virtue of enhancing environmental conditions for virtuousness, and not just to the character traits that enhance individual virtuousness.

Environmental virtue ethics has mainly applied the traditional conceptions of virtue and virtuous agent. I think that a notion of ecological virtue can contribute to the discussion about environmental virtue ethics in a way that is also relevant for practical political debates. Ronald Sandler, who was among the first to developed environmental virtue ethics, defends a theory of virtue that is appropriately informed by environmental values. He denies, however, that the virtue-oriented approach could properly count as an environmental ethic, because the virtue approach “does not suppose that interactions and relationships with the environment constitute a discrete ethical sphere, or that environmental problems and issues require a distinctive form of practical reasoning, moral epistemology, method of ethics, set of evaluative resources, or metaethical framework”. Sandler’s view depicts a wider trend of how recent philosophically oriented environmental ethics seems to locate itself. Virtue ethicists are, of course, as defenders of an agent-based ethical theory among the first to acknowledge that the global environmental destructions and crises currently taking place on the Earth forces us to critically reflect on our philosophical tradition. As I have argued, in environmental ethics, the conceptions of human moral

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1182 This does not mean that it is not relevant for environmental issues, but that it is not a special field of ethics, rather, “a type of ethic familiar to the Western tradition that has been updated on the basis of contemporary work in moral philosophy, current scientific and ecological understanding […] a new, environmentally informed, justified, and responsive ethic, which is sensitive to values independent of us in nature and the range of environmental goods in our lives.” Sandler 2007, 142.
agent that have been uncritically adopted from modernist moral theoretical
discussions require some radical conceptual revision in accordance with scientific and
other evidence. However, not even Sandler defines how environmental virtue ethics
provides the dynamic for Western theoretical ethics. In this work, my endeavour has
been to draw this discussion a step further by introducing the idea of ecologically
relational moral agency.

Ecological virtue can be defined as a relational disposition. As such, it is appointed
to a collective rather than to an individual.\textsuperscript{1183} More precisely, virtue is a disposition
appointed to an ecologically structured nexus – an agency – that includes niches in
which human and nonhuman ingredients of the agential operations meet. Therefore,
the definition of virtue amounts in itself to environmental demands. The development
of virtue, like the formation of knowledge, requires that the relationships between the
members of the collective in question function together in a way that they generate
the best possible conditions for the collective to practise and train virtue, which is the
moral virtue (and obligation), and to approach truth, which is the epistemic virtue
(and obligation). Moral virtue and epistemological virtue are, thus, interconnected
via agency.\textsuperscript{1184} Because of the biological and material relationality of agency, there is
a close and complex connection between virtue and knowledge, and both are to be
practised in relation to the material environments, like landscapes.\textsuperscript{1185}

What practical implications this interpretation would have in environmental
conducts or values? At least it makes clear that the relational approach to
environmental ethics cannot restrict itself to human eco-social perspective in value
construction or in relationally valid actual norms. Cultivation of virtue would be
impossible if the operations of moral agency were intentionally degenerated by
excluding nonhuman partners of agency from definitions of good. Cultivating virtue
requires that an individual actor continuously questions his own perspective as a
member of the dominant species. The difficulty that may, however, remain concerns
the reliable principles in each actual moral context to balance between cultivating the
relational capacity of moral agency and cultivating ecological flourishing of the
ecosystems when it compromises real human goods (as far as one can reason those
goods). Since the members of human species are the only currently known actors who
can perform highly developed moral capacities, extinction of our species would not
(as far as we can now estimate) enhance relational moral capacity in the world. Hence,
extremely self-destructive environmental conducts and values of the human collective
seem not to represent the right direction according to relational ethics. This example
does not, of course, take us far into the practical solutions, and the fact may be that

\textsuperscript{1183} About collective virtue traits, see, for example, Reza Lahroodi: “Collective Epistemic Virtues,”
an ecological collaboration between persons, as well as non-human and cultural factors, such as a built
environment.

\textsuperscript{1184} For example, Little 2007a, and Hyman 2015. See also sections 3.3, 3.4 and 4.4. in this study. The
complex interconnection between virtues and knowledge opens, I think, a new window for
environmental ethics concerning the question of objectivity that it has surveyed throughout its history.

\textsuperscript{1185} Such relationships, however, may take the form of aesthetic experience, besides the causal
material one, and therefore they are hard to argue for or against. The influence of experienced landscapes
on religious beliefs is a more widely examined academic field. Among the theologians Sigurd Bergmann,
for example, has focused on the issue. The influence in other epistemic beliefs is discussed, for instance,
by Christopher Preston.
the ecologically relational idea of moral agency can be applied to slightly different ethical theories, and can have various practical outcomes.

5.3.2 RELATIONAL VIRTUES AND THE FINAL GOOD

In approaches categorised as neo-Aristotelian naturalism, theories of normativity spring from the relation between the natural good (“good for”) and final good (“good at”) that refers to virtue. Leaning on Aristotle, moral life and reasoning generate and develop virtuous character, and the authority of morality rests on the fact that virtues are connected with something that is good for the agent. The problem has yet been, as stated before, the definition of human nature, on which objective criteria for virtues are based. The challenge for a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics is this: If the fixed points, such as essential humanness, are ruled out, what can serve as the naturalist criterion for evaluation? How can the final good be defined? Without an objective fixed nature there is no ground for judging whether the changes in character instantiate progress or degeneration.

I have argued that universal moral ability defined on the grounds of some supreme shared human nature (or some supernatural feature in human beings), or final good defined by some universal properties of humans, is neither plausible nor necessary. However, some ground for the evaluation of character is required in order to make a difference between virtues and vices. In Martha Nussbaum’s view, this ground is partly found in factual human nature, but partly it can be bound to particular societies and expressions of the good in different contexts. Nussbaum defends the Aristotelian idea that human capabilities represent a final good; they have a claim to be realised. But instead of essentialism and metaphysical realism, she argues that the existence of certain common capabilities is an empirical matter: they have appeared in all types of human societies throughout history. Also, different societies can to some extent construct the list differently. Therefore, Nussbaum argues, the list of capabilities should be tentative and open-ended. The interpretive function of the cognitive faculties of living beings should be appreciated. Due to the varying practices of a community, there can be more than one true conception of virtues, too. Some objectivists may think Nussbaum has given up too much to be a realist. The criticism could be targeted, especially, against the weakness of moral authority: If the authority of morality relies partly on objective human nature, and partly on relative desires or deliberations, something should be added in order to preserve the plausibility of a theory as a realist one.

Unlike some critics, I think that Nussbaum’s view is compatible with realism, but it unnecessarily divides between two types of grounds for defining capabilities, namely objective (naturalistic human nature) and relative (particular social context) grounds. At this point relational realism differs slightly from Nussbaum’s approach. An ecologically relational understanding of moral agency would turn the focus to what connects these two aspects that in Nussbaum’s view appear as the ground only partly,

1187 Nussbaum 1995b, 72-5.
namely objective human nature and particular factors. The critical point of view taken in this study against the separatedness of human individuals in Nussbaum’s theory has also been put forward by David Wong, who argues for a relational type of Confucian virtue ethics. This separatedness also influences the moral requirements that are derived from Nussbaum’s list of human capabilities. But while Wong argues that the emphasis on separateness is unnecessary and should be replaced by cultural pluralism resulting from the engagements of human life, the critical notion made from the point of view of relational agency leads us to focus on the mechanisms of connectedness, instead, as the core of the common ground. These mechanisms make the variety of engagements with others commensurate.

Another Aristotelian virtue ethicist Philippa Foot seems to acknowledge this, but she also defends a form of strong naturalism and argues that human nature sets limits on the definitions of the good life. Although there are objective moral truths concerning certain issues, all moral disagreements are not rationally resolvable. But the reason simply seems to be that social standards and individual flourishing are not detachable from human ‘function’. Objectivity lies in an understanding of human nature and its function. As was argued earlier, the challenge for Foot’s natural teleology concerns its non-metaphysical basis of teleological virtue in human ‘function’. According to Foot, besides the fact that function refers to something particular that “has a certain place in the life of the individuals that belong to that species at a certain time”, it also refers to the final good. She avoids the problem of a simplified identification between virtue (good-at) and a human nature-based view of flourishing (good-for), but does not complete what then should be added to the idea of natural flourishing in order to evaluate virtuousness. A missing part could be found in the ecological relationality of agency: ‘function’ thus would not refer to subjects but to the processes that make agency. Flourishing identified by the function of the relational agency connects the contingencies of the agent to the objective aspects of the final good.

But there seems to be an imbalance in terms between virtue and flourishing, if extension concerns only the good for but not virtue. Flourishing as a term is actually

\[1188\] Wong argues that in Nussbaum’s theory, “individual human life is characterized by a strong form of separateness. [...] Separateness means being able to live one’s own life and nobody else’s. From this characteristic, Nussbaum derives guarantees of noninterference with certain choices that are personal and definitive of selfhood – marriage, childbearing, sexual expression, speech, and employment.” This separateness and uniqueness of viewpoint thus represents a common, shared element. According to Wong, strong separateness “implies freedom of association as well as freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. This is one of the crucial places at which Nussbaum’s pluralism begins to resemble a fairly stringent universalism.” Wong 2006, 99. Reference to Nussbaum 1995b, 79-80, 85. For more, see section 2.5.

\[1189\] Wong’s objection to Nussbaum’s “fixed human nature”, as he interprets her view, leads to a clearer defence of “pluralist relativism”. Wong himself defends the idea that both social co-operation and individual flourishing are the grounds for good. He argues that both effective agency and effective identity require a context of close relationships, as in the family. According to Wong, however, the universal constraints are sufficiently open-ended to argue that there is more than one true morality, which make the view relativist. However, I think, the idea could be added that as time goes on, and as the contexts change through practised relational virtues in social and ecological co-operations, the plurality of moralities would ideally cohere. Morally capable dialogues in the construction of our agency could provide this coherence.

\[1190\] Foot 2001, 32, fn.

\[1191\] In her Natural Goodness (Foot 2001), at least, the idea has not been completed.
seen in the context of a wider state of affairs: it requires, for instance, certain ecological structure and ecosystem services, which depend on various things, while virtue as a term refers to inputs of particular instances of moral agency (which we normally call human individuals). The environment – also when modified by human impact – enters into happiness, but what about virtue construction? The extension should, I suppose, be seen to concern also virtues. And this would be the case if the idea of ecologically relational moral agency were adopted. Then, the evaluative criterion of virtue has its natural reference in mechanisms for balanced, benevolent and inclusive environmental relations to take care of relational agency. It is worth reminding ourselves, however, that human function should not be understood as a stable state of affairs. It includes plurality because of the varieties in a particular place, in evolutionary time or in the particular players in an ecosystem. Consequently, the good for me is – in reality – distinguished from the good for those who constitute their agency in different environments. In that case, ethical battles between the particular views about good-for take place not just between persons or cultures but in various relationships of the material, social and cultural ecosystems that maintain different types of agency. No particular ecosystems survive as the final good. The only fixed points for evaluation that may replace Aristotelian essentialism and neo-Aristotelian narrative flourishing are those that can stay when time passes and evolution continues. The relational view refers to the idea that such a ‘fixed’ point can only be included in the way that things must “communicate” or be in dialogue for benevolent agency.1192

Christine Korsgaard criticises Foot’s project, arguing that it should be complemented with a neo-Kantian idea that all our values are relative to “our valuing capacities: the capacity to find something pleasant, interesting, enchanting, satisfying, or stimulating – and of course to experience the opposite responses as well”.

I agree with Korsgaard in that valuing capacities play a crucial role in the idea of human good, as well as natural flourishing as the evaluative criterion for virtuousness, and express something of the ‘final good’. Unlike Korsgaard, however, I think that the neo-Kantian description of valuing capacities is too narrow, and thus incomplete, because it remains individual. Moral and rational flourishing and value capacities are issues that result from the ideally balanced constitutive relationships of the agent with her material and mental others. Therefore, such relationships represent the virtuous life to which practising virtues lead.

I argue that the point through which relationally constructivist and relationally naturalist positions could coincide, and through which the final good might acquire its evaluative standard is derivable from the ideas of the ecologically relational ‘capacity of valuing’ and ‘moral flourishing’ of the agent. If this train of thought were plausible, we should accept that any description of actual human good is partial, because it is part of some particular ecological good. True moral judgements, in the actual sense, can only concern the direction towards the final good, but never reach that end. The concept of ecology can, however, help in defining the evaluative

1192 However abstract and non-precise such a measurement may be, it is conceptually potent, I argue, to challenge the mainstream idea of stable fixed points.
1193 Korsgaard 2012a, 10. See also chapter 4.
standard of ‘the right direction’, even if the aim of virtuousness (the final good) cannot be descriptively articulated. The idea of the relational virtue of agency thus seems to play a role as the primary good – like care in care ethics. This is one of the current discussions in virtue ethics.1194

5.3.3 CAPABILITIES IN THE AGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Nussbaum’s capabilities approach is currently one of the most used frameworks in the subfields of environmental ethics dealing with complex environmental issues, such as climate ethics. Among these applications is Breena Holland’s view of the environment as a meta-capability.1195 Holland argues that “because a stable climate system provides the necessary ecological context for engaging in personal, social, material, and political relationships that Nussbaum defines as basic to any minimally decent notion of human flourishing, [...] such a system should be understood as part of a broader ‘environmental meta-capability’ that enables all the capabilities worthy of protection as constitutional entitlements”.1196 In order to “make human life meaningful”, we need to have “an environment devoid of dangerous environmental impacts”. This meta-capability involves “being able to live one’s life in the context of ecological conditions that can provide environmental resources and services that enable the current generation’s range of capabilities; to have these conditions now and in the future”.1197

Another climate ethicist, Elizabeth Cripps, criticises Holland’s view by questioning whether environmental risks and damage in the future will necessarily harm individual flourishing. She asks, why such damage should matter, “except insofar as it threatens my life, health, or affiliation, or insofar as engagement with the natural world is central to my plan or life or conception of the good?”1198 The question is justified, does supposing environment as a meta-capability require an idea that “engagement with the natural world as central” and the functioning environment as a meta-capability for a meaningful human life are connected. I think, however, that Cripps is wrong in supposing that such a connection does not exist without individual voluntary choice or “a conception of the good”. If the scientific outcomes of recent investigations on human action, knowledge and will are correct, and they have been

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1194 The virtue theory formulated by Robert Adams, for instance, as an alternative approach to neo-Aristotelianism, includes some similar intentions. Especially the way in which the concepts of good, right, virtue and obligations are mutually related in his theory gives support to a relational normative theory. For Adams’s theory of obligation, see Robert M. Adams, Finite and Infinite Goods (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002): 231-44.
1195 Holland, B. 2008; Holland, B. 2012.
1196 Holland, B. 2012, 147. Another definition Holland has made about the environment is that it is a meta-capability that involves “being able to live one’s life in the context of ecological conditions that can provide environmental resources and services that enable the current generation’s range of capabilities; to have these conditions now and in the future”. Holland, B. 2008, 324.
1197 Holland, B. 2008, 324.
1198 Cripps 2013, 40. Instead of a virtue approach, Cripps herself adopts a clearly consequentialist, interest-based framework, and argues for weakly collective moral duties on the grounds of collective self-interest: “A set of human beings (moral agents) who are mutually dependent through a common fundamental interest have a weakly collective duty to cooperate to secure that interest, so long as this is possible without those individuals having to sacrifice some other fundamental human interests.” Cripps 2013, 48.
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plausibly interpreted here, it seems obvious that such a connection can actually be an empirical fact. As Holland does not suppose that “meaningfulness” is bound to a certain ecological state of affairs, but rather to capabilities linked with her life in an ecological context, her idea of a revised understanding of capabilities is an interesting one. However, Holland does not clearly argue the connection between this meta-capability and our moral commitment. The view proposed in this study, based on an ecologically relational notion of agency, might improve the argument with regard to normativity.

Two ideas could be added to environmental ethics based on the capabilities approach from the point of view of a relational approach. First, capabilities should be seen to reflect the good for the particular whose agency is constructed in cooperation with other living and non-living partners in her surroundings. This implies that her capability includes good co-operating skills. Second, a realisation of capabilities depends to a large extent on the capabilities of others who/that participate in the construction of agency. Promoting someone’s capabilities is thus never separable from promoting the capabilities of others, including, those of nonhuman animals, and the dynamic function of ecosystems. Moral obligation for the responsibility to others emerges, however, from the structure of the agency as such. The normative notion thus follows that if we are to respect the capabilities of human life, responsibility for the life-enhancing capacities of all kinds of nonhuman others – and for our ability to respectfully communicate with them on personal and political levels – is involved. We are responsible for the existence of moral agency, as well as for our ability to construct proper epistemic and moral judgements. Epistemic responsibility concerns not just the processes of knowledge formation, but also the formation of the conditions of knowledge formation. This means that even epistemic responsibility implies environmental responsibility. In order to get proper information in order to construct knowledge, as well as proper measurements for moral evaluation, we need to love those we rely on.

In the age of climate crisis, we are at the situation when species and ecosystems are widely threatened by human influence. This situation is a consequence of actions that were pretended to promote human goods. We have not been rational, not even in terms of self-interest. And such economic and institutional decisions still daily take place that weaken possibilities to promote human goods in the future. The problem partly lies in the flawed notion of rationality and implausible facts about human agent. In the age of the Anthropocene, we see ourselves reflected in the external world with relation to which we should develop our agency. This implies that the meaning of the cultural and social relationships increases in the nexus of rational agency, while the meaning of relationships with the variety of the natural others diminishes. The danger seems real for us that the degeneration of our agential diversity also degenerates our rational and moral capabilities.

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1199 See, for example, Hyman 2015.

1200 How I look at the object modifies my relationship to it, and through that, the object itself. It also modifies my (and my neighbours’) mental structures, conditions of knowledge formation, values and hence what it is possible to know about the object in the future.
Objectivity does not originate in distance. The preservation and enhancement of moral rationality and autonomy requires preservation and enhancement of the mechanisms of reflective co-operation. They may include issues like care, love, trust and wonder. Ordinary life actions have indirect moral implications, if they change the environmental conditions of constructing agency, without being categorised as “moral actions” in the traditional sense. Everyday life decisions concerning the environment engage us in constituting the prerequisites of our moral agency and, thus, the ability to approach the good: through influencing our moral beliefs we modify the moral future. A serious question for the actual moral life then is whether morally accepted lifestyles and current social moral codes really develop or degenerate the future conditions of moral agency, and hence, our most important capabilities, namely the conditions of flourishing human life. From the normative point of view, the relevant question is whether the relational shift can make such a difference in virtue ethics that it can resist the standard problems of an agent-focused virtue theory. The relational constitution of agency that resists any fixed nature can offer a perspective that widens agent-based virtue approaches to sensibility for ecological and material relationships as sustainers or degenerators of virtuousness. Ethical theory based on the notion of capabilities offers, I argue, a suitable framework for inviting relational agency. But, consequently, the theory takes clear steps towards constructivism, comparably to the way that Korsgaard’s constructivism was seen to take steps towards naturalism. It has been argued in this last chapter that focusing on narratives interwoven with the organic physical aspects of the constitution of agency questions the opposing natures of naturalism and constructivism. In fact, a mixed approach to normative ethics seems the most plausible one.\footnote{\footnote{Although I take here Nussbaum’s position to offer a ground for a relational shift, there are other promising candidates, too. Michael Slote, for instance, counts them as non-Aristotelian virtue approaches, but it seems to be a question of definition whether a theory develops neo-Aristotelian ethics or counts on non-Aristotelian. See Pettigrove 2018 and Slote 2011.}}

To sum up, according to relational moral realism, moral judgements can be modestly truth-apt, meaning that they may approach truth, although it is in fact impossible for any judgement ever to reach it. Relational realism is teleological by nature. All actual moral judgements, however ideal the situation would be, are incomplete. Not even total agreement between all agents could guarantee the truth concerning a moral judgement: any actual view of the final good – even if it is shared by all the reasonable agents or held from a third person’s perspective – cannot survive as the good for a conceptual reason. The “solution for the problem of shared ends”, to put it in Korsgaard’s terms, is not fixed to the content but to the way in which the ends are constructed and shared. Truth about the good exists, but it also escapes. Another problem in using the concept of good \textit{simpliciter} is that the good can never replace the particular goods that are necessary for the actual life in particular cases: they are the best for maintaining and enhancing moral agency. Good is, in this way, connected to the natural life, as naturalist virtue ethics claims. What is special for a relational account is that the procedures for appropriate criteria for approaching moral truth are not restricted either to the natural (or evolutive) or social (or discursive) structure, but to them both. It is crucial for a procedure to search for the ideal way the members
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of a collective agency communicate, and for the sympathy they cultivate for each other. Rather than talking about procedures for moral truth as emerging from discourse, we should talk about moral procedures emerging from organic dialogues. An ethical theory that adopts ecological relationality of moral agency should be the one that cares about the ecological virtuousness of the moral agent.
6 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to fill the gap in the academic philosophy with regard to the meaning of the relational operations of moral agency for environmental ethics. The question was stated as: Can the turn of focus to the concept of human agency conceptually clarify the meaning of natural relatedness for ethics in a philosophically sound way? The main task then was twofold. First was to construct the idea of a relational moral agency on the basis of the parallel aspirations of two critical stances taken in environmental ethics towards the modern conception, evolutionary naturalism and ecofeminist constructivism, with the help of interdisciplinary work. Second was to analyse the philosophical implications of relational moral agency in moral naturalism and moral constructivism as frameworks for environmental ethics. It was supposed that these implications could cast light on the possibilities of balancing the conceptual contradiction between an empirically plausible idea of agency and a philosophically plausible theory of ethics. The expectation was that if the relatedness of agential operations can clarify the theoretical challenges of environmental ethics, it will also have relevance from the wider perspective of philosophical ethics. In this concluding chapter, I move from the general findings to the more detailed ones.

Approach to the relationality of the construction and operations of agency appeared to be philosophically rich and conceptually challenging. The empirical sciences were found to offer enlightening relational explanations for mental operations, and they also appeared to be increasingly scrutinised among philosophers from different fields of philosophy. Adoption of a relational notion of agency to environmental ethics was described as a conceptual shift: it shifted the perspectives of both naturalist and constructivist theories and compelled them compromise with each other. Although relationality of the agential operations is an explanatory fact, it has philosophical implications, because it revises the common conceptions of, for instance, autonomy and rationality. Since modern ethics relies greatly on the humanist idea of agency, claimed to be a necessary condition for normative responsibilities and the autonomy of ethics, a relational shift does not only influence explanations of moral reasoning but also has conceptual implications. It challenges the concept of moral rationality, which, again, seems to have substantial implications in the theory of ethics. The conceptual shift changes ethical discourse by highlighting that the constitutive elements of agency are relationally constructed. It was argued that if operations transformative to the construction of agency cannot be clearly located in either natural causalities or in absolute freedom, but in the processes of relational cooperation that mix elements in a complex way, the central concepts of moral agency, such as autonomy, rationality and acts concerning normative reason, should be considered from the metaperspective as issues resulting from the actual agency construction. This was argued not to compromise the philosophical method, nor to imply any metaphysical suppositions about essential relational natures from which normative obligations could be derived. Relationality was seen as a fact about
the states of affairs, the awareness of which was important, since the actual moral
rationality possible for human animals is always constructed in the context in which
they live. This was argued not to overrule the modest idea of modest realism in ethics:
the mechanisms of relatedness may be objectively better or worse.

A general conclusion that inspired me most from the viewpoint of environmental
ethics was that since relational agency implies that the processes of agency engage
active elements of the surrounding environments, the environments in which moral
agency is continuously constructed significantly contributes to the results of moral
reasoning. From the point of view of environmental ethics, the idea that the
environment actively participates in the operations of agency implies that destruction
and other changes in the environment highly influence the rational and moral
abilities of the agent. If this conclusion is plausible, it can shift the place and role of
contingent environmental facts even in the most humanist moral arguments.
Therefore, I argue, the study showed that the philosophical work on conceptual clarity
is helpful for environmental ethics and philosophy, and that environmental
philosophy also has its place as a field of ‘real’ philosophy – as far as it is a field about
how the world and human conduct are conceptualised, instead of just a speculative
project. The facts of threatened environmental sustainability and increasing scientific
understanding of the human mind are enough to provide conceptual challenges that
require the discipline of ethics for self-reflection, and for revising some of its common
presuppositions.1202 But it has also been argued that this conclusion from the
relationality of agential processes implies that the contradiction between the
tendencies of environmental ethics to defend autonomy and the authority of ethics
but not apply implausible suppositions about human agency interestingly dissolves
away – although this requires a relationally revised understanding of moral realism.
It was argued that if this conclusion is plausible, it has relevance beyond the discipline
of environmental ethics.

The research questions set for this study, were the following: (1) How do the
strategies for environmental ethics conceptualise human moral agency and what
possible problems and promises are included in the scientific plausibility or
philosophical implications of these conceptions? (2) What kind of scientific and
philosophical support is there for the aspirations of critical stances to the modernist
notion of developing a relational idea of agency, and how might such an idea be
articulated? (3) What would be the philosophical implications of adopting an
ecologically relational idea of moral agency in moral naturalism, on the one hand, and
moral constructivism, on the other hand, especially as frameworks for environmental
ethics? (4) What are the prospects for an agent-focused ethical theory formulated on
the idea of relational moral agency being a realist one?

The study was structured according to the main research questions. Following
the questions, the study started by analysing the conception of moral agency in
environmental ethics. Three strategies were distinguished: one that adopts the
presuppositions of modern humanism central for the conception of agency was used
as a reference line, and two others, which were critical towards it, one adopting a

1202 Jamieson 2012, 194; Gardiner 2010, 83, 85.
naturalist conception from an evolutionary point of view and the other adopting a constructivist conception of moral agency, were compared to it and with each other. The premises, as well as the philosophical strengths and weaknesses of each conception were analysed from the point of view of environmental ethics. While the main problems for the modern conception were its plausibility and tendency to trivialise environmental relationships, the problems for the critical strands were either the reduction of morality to natural mechanisms, which is the claim of evolutionary debunking arguments, for instance, or lurking antirealism in the case of socially constructed agency. The main finding was that despite the differences, the criticisms analysed together refer to commonalities that make it justified to consider their aspirations as parallel projects towards a relational idea of agency. Neither approach clearly articulated the aspired idea of agency, but it was found justified to call the approached view ecologically relational moral agency.

Parallel ideas were further developed in chapter 3 by introducing a wide variety of empirical and philosophical studies in support of the relationality of human mental operations and the relevance of environment for the processes of agency. The selected sources were analysed interdisciplinarily in order to construct an initial but coherent conception of relational moral agency. Most of the selected studies were supportive of those initial ideas of relational agency that were shared by modest naturalist and constructivist arguments in environmental ethics. They were used together with the collected external support to articulate the concept of ecologically relational moral agency. According to scientific evidence the most plausible naturalist explanations of human nature and mental operations are not necessarily the reductionist or the physicalist ones, but non-reductionist explanations that refer to interactive or transactive naturalist claims. In the philosophy of mind, one of the most promising concepts of mind for constructing a relational notion of agency was the extended mind thesis, which described mental operations as environmentally extended in an interactive way, as well as arguments for enactivism. The connected discussions were recognised as various and are worth further research. These explanatory approaches challenge moral philosophers to self-reflect on their negative attitudes towards critical discussion on the modern presupposition concerning the operations of agency. However, the construction of the notion of an ecologically relational moral agency was not concluded in this study and was purposefully left as initial. Concluding a definite concept requires further philosophical work and discussion.

Despite the fact that the definition remained incomplete, the implications of these specific features of relational agency were seen as possible to be analysed in context of the naturalist and constructivist frameworks of ethics that were made in chapter 4. With regard to naturalism, among the interesting implications were that a relational shift would make reductionist naturalism more suspicious than non-reductionist forms of naturalism, and the debunking arguments should thus not be seen as threatening the autonomy of ethics. In the debates among naturalist explanations of human morality, a relational view was seen to support, at least partly, the originally Darwinian idea that moral agency would be worth investigating within a continuum from animal to human agency without categorising human acts as unique in kind rather than in complexity. If this is a plausible view, we owe much of our moral skills
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to the ultra-sociality of our nature, but much more than that, to the tendency of our ancestors to continuously practise skills of sociality (or: skills of relationality). As we can see from animals socialised to a pack with human members, dogs, for instance, can learn cultural codes. And even during the lifetime of an individual animal, it can develop skills of reasoning and evaluation to the level that it risks its own life to save someone else’s life without being trained to do so. It was argued that the Darwinian idea would not imply reductionism nor debunking the autonomy of ethics if relational agency was taken to be true, but it might point out that the cultivation of moral abilities is, indirectly through cultivating the best possible ways of being related, part of a normative system. For philosophical ethics, this comes close to certain modes of virtue ethics.

With regard to constructivism, Christine Korsgaard’s work was used as a framework to enlighten the implications of relationality. Korsgaard’s theory explains the source of normativity in the legislative will, which means that the constitution of agency provides normative self-governance, but if the agency as relational involves environmental ingredients, the construction of agency partly relies on these external partners. A relational shift in Korsgaard’s transcendental argument was thus seen to challenge the usual metaethical categories.

Finally, the possibility of constructing environmental ethics from a relational point of view was initially sketched, and its prospects to represent moral realism were analysed. I argued in chapter 5 that a kind of moral realism can be defended, but a revised definition of moral realism is required, if mutually transformative relationships, in which also material elements play a part, are constitutive for the agency, and if the relational constitution of agency that functions as the “fixed point” of an agential ethical theory is seen to develop in time. The common categories of realism and expressivism, for instance, do not any more validly express the relevant metaethical distinctions. It was argued that it seems possible to think of moral truth in cognitive terms, but not in terms of representational truth (nor only in the sense of coherence). In order to clarify the situation, truth about the moral contents was distinguished from truth about the methods of agency construction toward constructing the best possible conducts. Consequently, the actual moral truth was hypothetically separated from the final truth.

A summary of my conclusions in more detail. The conclusions of this study can be summarised in six arguments or claims. Each concluding argument includes subquestions, the results of which support the main argument. Together the six concluding arguments can be seen to create the general conclusion, which is the answer to the main question that was set for this study: how do recent discussions on moral agency among environmental ethics challenge the presuppositions of modernist moral theories, and what kind of implications do these challenges have concerning the nature of human morality and theories of ethics? I shall now conclude by putting the six arguments (marked by numbers) briefly together in the order they were focused on in the line of thought of this study and summarise the results in the main subquestions of each argument (marked by letters). After that I shall make some suggestions for further studies.
(1) As the first conclusion I argued that in light of the empirical evidence focused recently in the natural sciences, together with the connected psychological and philosophical research on the mind and human cognitive or intentional operations, it is justified to claim that the conception of the moral agent (especially her reasoning and autonomy) adopted in mainstream post-Enlightenment modern ethics is implausible. When this is accepted, it is important to discover what implications the poor claims about human agency have had in the normative theories of ethics. (a) It was argued in chapter 2 that the ability of modern moral theories to deal with the complex problems of environmental ethics at least partly entails the adopted presuppositions concerning, for example, the freedom, autonomy and reasoning of the moral agent. The arguments for revised understanding of human moral agency among the argumentations for environmental ethics were then analysed, and (b) it was discovered that critical voices had emerged from philosophically opposing traditions of naturalist, especially evolutionary arguments about human mind and agency, and constructivist, especially feminist arguments about the agency. (c) A further conclusion was made from the analysis that both of these critical approaches to the modernist notion of moral agency aim to formulate some type of relational notion of the agency. In that relational notion, both evolutionary ethicists and ecofeminists emphasise that the relational operations involve various influential elements of the conditions of human life and the environment, including, for example, bodily, material, social and mental elements.

(2) As the second conclusion I argued that the most plausible explanations of mental operations and the origins of morality support the view that the moral agent should not be considered an individual human being, but rather that agential operations and moral ability are deeply involved in the relational nature of mental operations. In chapter 3, explanations of moral agency were investigated in order to construct an overview of an ecologically relational notion of moral agency. The criticisms posed by environmentalists appeared to be compatible with the current understanding of empirical sciences, psychology and philosophical anthropology about the nature of the human mind and mental operations, and they call into question the modernist presuppositions of moral agency as an individual, free agency that relies on some uniquely human feature that makes the core of agency isolated from the external conditions of deliberation. There was thus evidence that makes it justified to consider moral agency in environmentally relational terms. As the evidence and grounds for sketching such a view, various examples of arguments were introduced from natural and social sciences, cognitive science, psychology and philosophical anthropology. Among the central results that supported the second conclusion, were the following. (a) It seemed plausible to believe that the moral abilities of a human agent have developed naturally due to the ultra-sociality of the human species. This supports and is linked with two other notions: According to a plausible view of evolutionary science, (b) human moral ability is not non-natural, and in that sense, it differs from the agency of other animals more in degree than in kind. (c) But this ability did not emerge, nor does it function, as an ability of an individual. Instead, morality depicts the relational construction of human society and the environment in which it lives: the origins of morality are in human ultra-sociality,
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not in individual actions, and the relational structure of agency is the platform to
practise, maintain and, perhaps, develop it. According to empirically supported
philosophical views about the mind, (d) mental operations are not restricted to the
mind but are instead extended to include elements of the environment in mutual
interactivity. A specific result from the point of view of environmental ethics was that
the sources supported the view that (e) the processes of agency combine material/
ecological/evolutionary facts with the mental/social/cultural elements in agential
operations. Mental processes are both ecologically and socially extended and
fundamentally interrelated.

This had various implications, but the most important ones, I supposed, concern
epistemology and action theory. Knowing described as cooperation between the
subject and the object of knowledge, for example, entails that (f) knowing results from
practising some kind of dialogical acticity, which is, as such, influenced by the
attitudinal elements included in the process. This, interestingly, mixes cognitive and
non-cognitive operations. For the theory of action relational operations mean, for
example, that (g) autonomy can be seen to spread into the collective or the
environmentally extended unit of action. This implies that responsibility for actions
is also spread rather than just direct. One thus needs to take care of autonomy and
responsibility through indirect actions with regard to other partners, conditions of
action and various elements in the surroundings. The benevolence of the
environments is needed in order to perform responsibility concerning a particular
issue. One has to take care of many things in order to be capable of acting responsibly.
Especially important is the finding that (h) cognitive and voluntary actions are
mutually interconnected in operations, which means that the contents of reason
cannot just be considered as means in practical moral deliberation, as if they would
be separable from the acts that set the goals.

(3) As the third conclusion, I argued that the relational shift in explanations
concerning agential operations implies not only that reasoning should be seen to take
place in the nexus of interactive relationships, but it also seems to imply a shift in the
concept of rationality. The relational structure as such seems to play a role in
rationality. Since rationality is central for both epistemic and moral systems, a
possible conceptual shift concerning rationality would be philosophically influential:
the focus should clearly be turned from conditions of moral reasoning to the question
of moral reasons. If such a conceptual shift is plausible, it brings about metaethical
questions, too. In chapter 4 the focus was turned to the philosophical implications.

(4) As the fourth conclusion I claimed that if the proposed view of moral reasoning
as environmentally extended is plausible, meaning that the processes of agency
extend the individual mind and include elements of the environment in cooperation
with which the reasoning takes place, and that agential operations are constituted in
the complex nexus of relationships, the implications are not only explanatory, but also
conceptual and even normative by nature. These implications can, I argue,
interestingly contribute to the theoretical discussion on environmental ethics, but
besides that, the relational conceptual shift seems to heavily contribute to the
philosophical discussion on the theory of ethics. There are several subresults that led
to this conclusion.
The philosophical implications were scrutinised in chapter 4 by adopting relational agency to selected formulations of naturalist ethics on the one hand, and constructivist ethics on the other. In both cases investigation was made, first, from the point of view of the implications in those environmentalists’ positions that criticised the modernist notion of agency in the first place and called for taking the constitutive role of the contextual contingencies in agency seriously. As a result, it was seen that (a) the relational approach seems to soften both naturalists and constructivists in the metaethical sense and draw them closer together or inspire them to defend some mixed or hybrid positions. Agency that extends to include even material relationships mixes factual causalities and intentional operations in a way that seems to blur the clear division between determined operations and free actions, which implies that the categories of constructed and non-constructed realities become vague. Second, the implications were investigated in the light of selected elaborated approaches to naturalist and constructivist ethics, although not necessarily in context of environmental ethics. Examples of theories were selected to which relational agency is applicable, or which take steps in that direction or even involve features of relational agency, and thus can elucidate philosophical implications in normative ethical theories. This was most fruitfully exemplified by an appeal to Christine Korsgaard and Martha Nussbaum. Korsgaard’s position was found to offer the theory of normativity that works well in the case of relational agency, while Nussbaum’s position offered one possible ground to approach moral concepts should the concept of relational agency be adopted.

The implications that came out especially in the case of naturalism, were the following: The fact that the relationship between the brain and consciousness should be considered as somehow interactive implied that (b) the dictating role of causality, which has been the naturalist dogma, should be questioned. This means that reductionism in naturalist ethics is implausible: natural relationships have influences that are not reducible to physical or mental causalities. (c) Cognitive operations and reasoning as relational imply that the only possibility for moral deliberation and approaching moral truths is included in the proper use of natural relationships that are dynamic and dialogical. And besides this (d) moral rationality necessarily also concerns responsibilities for things that belong to the external environment. From the point of view of environmental ethics this means that (e) it is irrational to make a difference between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism in environmental ethics. (f) As far as moral facts are connected with natural facts, their relationship is not one of representation, which is the common interpretation of naturalist realism in ethics. (g) The idea that moral concepts are connected with natural facts should be interpreted to mean, if relational agency is accepted, that there is at each actual moment better and worse ways to act with regard to agency constituting, the former reflecting virtuousness and the latter reflecting evil, and this is a moral fact that has to do with the actual contingent natural facts. (h) Since these natural facts are, as ingredients in agency, influenced by these acts, the direction of the further development of moral agency depends on the actually practised relationships. Due to the non-reductionism included in relational explanations of ethics, even the use of natural (animal) agency makes changes in the world that have, again, implications for agency. Such acts...
resulting from non-moral agency also have normative status. (i) But besides this, a metaethically demanding realist claim can be subscribed: the active use of agency can make the world better or worse, at least in some semi-objective sense derived from the functions of agency. The direction of the development can thus be evaluated to be better or worse (so that moral realism holds true), but this direction is not a non-natural fact (non-naturalism) nor is it reducible to any content of natural facts (common naturalism) but refers to the way of approaching ideal relational agency (virtue naturalism).

In the case of constructivism, the most important implications of the relational shift were the following: (j) The intentional elements in construction that are thought to provide the autonomy of agency are not free in the common sense. Instead of absolute freedom, the course of action can be changed indirectly through changes in the conditions of the agency by which it is constituted, and they include bodily elements and elements of ecological and social environments. (k) Therefore, successful moral construction requires cultivating the conditions of autonomy and rationality, which implies that the environmental conditions, such as the functions of ecosystem services and nonhuman partners in the construction need to be cared for. (l) As the source of obligation can, according to Christine Korsgaard’s constructivism, be derived from the self-governance of the agency, applying the relational notion of agency involves the entire, environmentally extended agency in this process of self-governance. This makes a difference in the theory concerning the locus of the normative self-governance. Therefore, the constitution of agency is the most crucial issue for relationally constructivist ethics, which should then be considered to involve also natural elements of the ecological nexus in the autonomous agency. However, normativity can be explained in a basically constructivist way even when the extended notion of relational agency is applied. This kind of constructivism does not imply antirealism, but (m) in contrast to the common interpretation of realist constructivists, for instance the Kantian transcendental argument and procedural realism, the relational concept of agency makes a shift that implies responsibility for material and ecological structures as a precondition for moral rationality. In the case of Korsgaard’s neo-Kantianism, for instance, the self-constitution of agency should be seen to include external participants in relation to which the agency is constructed. The way in which relationships function influences the ability of the agent to solve practical problems. (n) Metaethical constructivism argues that philosophical problems originate, first and foremost, from conceptual confusion. It was argued that constructivists are correct in claiming that the problems of environmental ethics are, in a way, conceptual by nature. But in contrast to standard constructivism, a relational notion of agency resists the claim that moral concepts express cultural narratives, language or other constructions that would deny moral realism of any kind. The relational conceptual shift points out the role of the material environment in mental activity of any kind.

(5) As the fifth conclusion I argued that the conceptual shift in agency, which in environmental ethics is discussed in order to formulate plausible normative ethics for environmental problems, contributes, in fact, in substantial philosophical questions about the nature of ethics, especially the question about the source of moral reason.
The argumentations of environmental ethicists in defence of relational agency seemed, at the first glance, contradictory: On the one hand, they called for taking empiricism seriously, namely recognising the relational relevance of the contingent conditions and contextual relationships of the agent for morally justified conducts in an actual situation in order for the concept of moral agency to be empirically plausible and in order to plausibly argue for motivation. On the other hand, they called for taking rationalism seriously, namely defending the critical force and the normative authority of ethics in order to make the theory efficient and morally binding. However, (a) it was seen that this contradiction partly dissolves when considering the relational shift in agency, since empirical explanations of moral reasoning and the concept of rationality become mutually interdependent. (b) The implications of relational moral rationality have to do with the blurred edges of both the empiricist strand of ethics and the humanist strands of ethics in rationalism and constructivism. Naturalist and constructivist accounts of the character of human morality and moral conducts are in tension with each other, but the notion of relational agency may melt away this type of categorising as it is suspicious of both reductionist naturalism as well as reductionist modernist humanism.

(c) The tension between freedom and nature counts among the fundamental problems for those who wish to argue for the authority and autonomy of ethics and, at the same time, take seriously the empirically plausible notions of human naturality and thus this tension remains among the central theoretical challenges for environmental ethics. On the philosophilcal level, the tension between nature and freedom is not easy to solve, since even the most plausible teleological theories, such as Kant’s teleological turn, include problems. Aspirations to overcome this tension by unifying them by appeal to ontological holism or Romanticism are problematic; moral guidance should not be derived from any prompting of natural sentiment. (d) However, it was argued that the question should, perhaps, be set differently. Perhaps it should be asked whether the tension entails from improperly located or categorised poles. The question is, whether “the moral community of free humans” can be categorically and absolutely separated from “the causally determined natural environment” or not. If the arguments of this study are plausible, further research will be needed to explore whether the relational shift can dissolve hardwired categories concerning the main dividing issue between moral naturalism (seen as an empiricist approach) and moral constructivism (seen as a humanist approach), namely the conceptual contradiction between causal determination and human freedom. (e) Despite the fact that some tension between freedom and nature may persist, this study shows, however, that ever more pressure is laid on philosophers to articulate a mixed position that includes an empirically plausible notion of the relational operations of agency. Environmental ethicists and epistemologists are among those who apply this pressure.

(f) Empiricism and rationalism seem to become partly mixed in the relational notion of agency. Empiricism cannot fruitfully contribute to moral philosophy if it is

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Examples of such research already done by the environmental philosophers referred to in this study are, for instance, Robert Kirkman’s idea of Darwinian humanism and Christopher Preston’s idea of materialised morality. See, e.g. Kirkman 2009 and Preston 2010.
considered to involve hard reductionism. This is not, however, necessary. It was seen
that one of the decisive issues here is the concept of agency. It was argued that
focusing the contents of moral concepts regardless of the agency is misleading: moral
concepts are not reducible to either of the explanatory determinants of agency. This
is due to the transformative nature of the interactions that form agency. In this sense,
what was thought as an empirical fact, may play a role in the rationality in the
constitution of agency.

(6) And as the sixth conclusion I claimed that the implications of an ecologically
relational conception of moral agency are especially interesting from the point of view
of environmental ethics. (a) Regardless of the philosophical implications, the
normative implications of adopting a relational notion of agency in environmental
ethics are notable: responsibility should be widened to concern all types of
relationships with the environment, such as, for example, urban planning, aesthetic
design, acceptance and resistance of various cultural habits, getting in touch with the
wilderness, emotional recognition of nonhuman others, activity in getting
information about sustainability and, especially, activity to make oneself aware of
one’s actions in a way that, increasingly, allegedly non-intentional actions with regard
to environmental relationships are forced to be intended. Actions that are considered
to be non-moral if they do not hurt anyone’s values should be made moral. The notion
of relational agency calls for responsibility for making oneself ever more responsible
for one’s environmental relationships. (b) Intentional and nonintentional actions
become mixed, too, through their role in making changes to the material conditions
of deliberation for agency. This implies that moral conducts concerning
environmental responsibilities cannot be restricted to individual actions only, or to
clearly intentional actions only, or to one moment of time only. (c) Environmental
responsibilities extend to concern collective actions, non-intentional actions that
have influences in material and eco-social conditions of knowledge formation and
emotional reactions, memories of previous actions and reactions to them, and even
creative thinking that constructs the future conditions of action.

It was shown that the agent-focused strategies for environmental ethics share the
view that the relational conceptual shift is needed to conceptualise the responsibilities
for the conditions of individual and collective agency, and for future generations. If
the proposed steps towards a relational approach to morality are plausible, (d)
relationally constituted agency provides a moral theory to cross the traditional border
between emotion-base ethics and reason-based ethics. Reason, which is required for
ethics and is often considered to ensure moral realism, cannot be considered the
reason of an individual. Neither can it be detached from the natural processes of the
material environment in relation to which it is continuously transformed. (e) The
approach to the relational concept of moral agency that arose from the environmental
and philosophical resources of this study can be described as pre-eminently
functional rather than ontological. An ecologically relational approach to ethics does
not derivy moral claims from an ontological notion of nature or relational subjects.
Considering moral agency as ecologically relational does not imply the adoption of
any specific metaphysical, religious or other given presuppositions. On the contrary,
I argue that on the basis of used sources it is justified to claim that relational concepts
are open to continuous discussions with the empirical sciences and philosophy. But it seems plausible, on the basis of the study thus far, that (f) this does not involve concessions in questions of autonomy or the authority of ethics. Therefore, the initially sketched relational approach to the theory of ethics can be called relational realism.

*The study opened up several topics worth further research.* Here are just a few. In spite of many constructive ideas and initial implications, the notion of relational moral agency remained incomplete in this study. Academic research concerning relational, interactive, transactive or enactive perspectives on mental operations and action is so various and rapidly increasing that it was not possible to suppose that the sources used in this study could provide the whole picture. This is the first of my suggestions for further research: to clarify the challenges and helpful ideas offered by the recent understanding of relational features of mental operations and action to supply constructive discussion in philosophical ethics. If the defended argument is plausible, questions concerning metaethics, especially definitions of realism, are relevant. This is another topic worthy of a qualified meta-ethicist to investigate, namely what kind of metaethically relevant implications are there from a relational notion of agency? Within the limits of this study, it was not possible to provide a final constructive notion about relational realism. Instead, an interesting question remains: can constructivism and naturalism together provide a coherent theory in which the constructivist normativity argument and the naturalist content argument could converge.

Still another topic worth further research is what new perspectives can a relational notion of agency open for virtue ethics, especially concerning the possible shift in the naturalist argument that relational agency could provide? Because the line of thought defended in this study emphasises the constitution of agency as developing during the interactions between the constituents rather than stable, a basically virtue ethical approach to the idea of truth seems the most fruitful. But because of the problems of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics with the source of normativity, it would be worth investigating whether the relational idea of agency could help in combining it with some relational theory of normativity. Christine Korsgaard’s idea of the normative constitution of agency was found to be a potentially promising one. So, one further topic worth researching concerning ethical theory, I would suggest, concerns the prospects of combining Korsgaard’s idea of normativity and an agent-based virtue ethical approach to the best possible method of relationality that involves the realist idea of the truth. Finally, the study offers plenty of material from the point of view of environmental ethics, but it was not possible to construct them further. My supposition is that the idea of indirect duties through agency construction, for instance, can offer potentially interesting viewpoints for different fields of environmental ethics.
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