

Ethical Naturalism and the Constitution of Agency

John Hacker-Wright

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1 Introduction

Neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalists generally claim that human beings need virtues, where their claim is understood to mean that human beings need virtues in order to flourish or prosper.¹ They aim to establish a connection between goodness and flourishing for human beings. Advocates of this view must respond to the apparent possibility that we can be good human beings without flourishing or be flourishing human beings without being good. Rosalind Hursthouse argues that being virtuous is the only reliable path if we want to flourish, just as a modest diet and exercise are the only reliable way to become healthy.² Yet, as Julia Annas points out, this argument is unsatisfactory. There are circumstances, such as living in a depraved society, in which it would not benefit someone to live virtuously, and it is reasonable to ask why human beings should commit themselves to virtue when the desired result, to flourish, relies on many factors that are beyond our control.³ In addition to the contingencies of the world, there are contingencies of our psychology. As Nietzsche and, more recently, Bernard Williams argue, it is at least equally plausible to believe that human psychology is such that instead of being fulfilled by morality, we will instead be frustrated by it. As Williams puts it, the Aristotelian view seems to presuppose an inner nîsus to virtues, which is called into question by Darwinian biology, since it is “an open question whether the evolutionary success of humanity, in its extremely brief period of existence, may not rest on a rather

¹ See Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 185.

² Hursthouse, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

³ Julia Annas, “Virtue Ethics: What Kind of Naturalism?” in Stephen Gardiner, ed. *Virtue Ethics Old and New* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 20; see also David Copp and David Sobel, “Morality and Virtue,” *Ethics*, vol. 114, 2004.

J. Hacker-Wright (✉)
Department of Philosophy, University of Guelph, Guelph, ON N1G 2W1, Canada
e-mail: jhackerw@uoguelph.ca

ill-assorted *bricolage* of powers and instincts.”⁴ Against Williams, Hursthouse claims that the ambiguity of the evidence should lead us to hope that human beings can find a greater sense of fulfillment in morality. Yet, this is an admission that virtues have uncertain justification in light of our present evidence. The approach Hursthouse takes to neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism presupposes a specific, substantive view of human nature that is vulnerable to refutation by scientific findings about human biology and psychology, which leaves the foundations of ethics in a precarious position. Moreover, Williams is not alone, inasmuch as other philosophers over the last several decades have argued that the neo-Aristotelian view, so understood, is in conflict with contemporary biology. From their perspective, it seems clear that the idea that being good results in flourishing is, at best, an uncertain proposition.⁵

The central difficulty of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism lies in the attempt to connect being a good human being with being happy. Another version of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism is possible, according to which human beings need virtues in order to achieve normal human agency. To act well is to attain a condition of non-defective human agency. Someone who exhibits a vice is defective as a human being because he is unresponsive to reasons that would evoke a response from an otherwise non-defective human agent. This makes him defective as an agent. Someone who acts well need not thereby attain happiness or prosperity. It is enough that he attains normal agency. On this view, the vindication of having virtues is, at least in one respect independent of scientific findings regarding human nature, as the vindication will not depend on claims regarding the conditions under which human beings achieve happiness. Yet, it is also partially independent of empirical claims about human nature in that the view is founded on the fact that normally we are agents, and this is not a straightforward empirical statement about human beings. We cannot learn that we are agents from observation but must affirm that we are agents in order to act. We must see ourselves as part of a species whose members are normally agents, a fact which has important normative implications. On this view, our self-understanding as members of a life form in which agency is normal informs our concept of harm. It is a sufficient, though not a necessary, condition for something to count as harmful if it undermines our agency. Such harms are *pro tanto* bad, and must be understood as such by any rational human agent. Given certain readily available facts regarding our physical vulnerability to depredation, we can appreciate that any minimally informed rational human agent must embrace some very general norms that preclude inflicting such harms. This argument does not yield a complete conception of justice that would provide

⁴ Bernard Williams, “Replies,” in *World, Mind, and Ethics*, J. E. J. Altham and R. Harrison eds. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 199.

⁵ See Chrisoula Andreou, “Getting On in a Varied World,” *Social Theory and Practice*, vol. 32, 2006; see also Louise M. Antony, “Natures and Norms,” *Ethics*, vol. 111, 2000; see also David Copp and David Sobel, “Morality and Virtue: An Assessment of Recent Work in Virtue Ethics,” *Ethics*, vol. 114, 2004; William FitzPatrick, *Teleology and the Norms of Nature* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000); Joseph Millum, “Natural Goodness and Natural Evil,” *Ratio*, vol. 19, 2006; and Scott Woodcock, “Philippa Foot’s Virtue Ethics Has an Achilles’ Heel,” *Dialogue*, vol. 45, 2006.

conclusions about such matters as the morality of abortion, but it does provide the foundation for the further development of a conception of justice.⁶ On this view, the case for justice in ethical naturalism will not depend on the uncertain ground of psychological findings about human happiness, and this fact puts the foundations of morality within neo-Aristotelian naturalism on firmer ground.

This version of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism is close to Kantian constitutive views of normativity, such as the view defended in the recent work of Christine Korsgaard.⁷ The essential idea of such views is that there are standards internal to action itself, which agents must adhere to if they are to be authors of actions. All agents must take up certain aims or act from certain motives if they are to be non-defective agents, on such views, and whatever aim or motive is constitutive of agency is thereby normative for all agents. On the view we will consider, being just, or something approximating that aim, is necessary for anyone who sees himself as an agent. This proposal attracts similar objections to the objections faced by Kantian constitutivists. David Enoch argues that Kantian constitutive views of normativity do not provide explanations for why we should be concerned about being agents.⁸ A skeptic, he argues, could happily agree that he is not an agent, but, instead, something similar to an agent while having no concerns about constituting himself as an agent. In a similar vein, David Copp and David Sobel argue that neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalists face the challenge of convincing us as to why we should care so much about being human beings.⁹

There are effective neo-Aristotelian responses to skeptical objections to constitutive views. As human beings, we are agents in a distinctive way, a concept that we grasp by doing things, and because we possess such understanding about ourselves agency is more than a simple fact for human beings; it is a fact that is unavoidably thrust upon any self-conscious human being. Due to the practicality of this knowledge of human agency, human vulnerability to depredation, which is an all too readily available datum of human life, is inescapably relevant to human reasoning.

2 Agency and Human Nature

Rational agency is a particularly important aspect of human nature. Agency is necessarily a central aspect of our self-understanding because, to the extent that we acquire reason, we must understand ourselves as agents and, indeed, we must understand ourselves as members of a species in which agency is normal. The fact that we are normally agents, a fact that we must recognize in order to be agents, has normative implications for us.

⁶ See Philippa Foot, "Morality and Art," in *Moral Dilemmas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁷ See Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); see also Christine Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁸ See David Enoch, "Agency, Shmagency: Why Normativity Won't Come from What is Constitutive of Action," *Philosophical Review*, vol. 115, 2006.

⁹ Copp and Sobel, op. cit., p. 536.

In “Two Sorts of Naturalism,” John McDowell argues that anything that can acquire reason must likewise possess the ability to act on reasons. He says: “We cannot allow ourselves to suppose that God, say, might confer reason on wolves, but stop short of his giving them the materials to step back and frame the question: ‘Why should I do this?’”¹⁰ According to McDowell, then, any reason-conferring upbringing will likewise confer an ability to act on reasons. To the extent that we acquire reason, we likewise acquire rational agency. Inasmuch as reason and rational agency are both normal attainments for human beings, we can say that there is a categorical proposition that is true of human beings, that human beings are rational agents. McDowell notes that such categorical propositions are unlike genuine universally quantified propositions. They characterize a norm for a form of life that can be true without being true of all of its members. Due to the logical oddity of the categorical propositions, McDowell thinks that the prospects for deriving practical norms from them are dim.¹¹ After all, from the fact that human beings are social animals, it does not follow that a desert anchorite who acknowledges this fact has any reason to rejoin society. On McDowell’s view, such categorical propositions carry weight in the reasoning of an agent, only if he has had an upbringing that allows such matters to have influence over him. Given an upbringing that has successfully inculcated traditional virtues, the fact that someone could easily save another from drowning will register as a practical imperative to help. A virtuous agent may therefore recognize it as a true and practically relevant categorical proposition that human beings help each other when in distress. Yet, on McDowell’s view, the possible evaluative stances conferred by our upbringing are wide open. As he puts it: “Any second nature of the relevant kind, not just virtue, will seem to its possessor to open his eyes to reasons for acting.”¹² Aristotelians believe that only virtuous people get it right, but for McDowell, this judgment is the provisional result of an ongoing, revisionary scrutiny of our reasons.

Despite what McDowell maintains, our agency necessarily carries some normative weight, inasmuch as we attain reason. Agency is a normative foundation of any reason-conferring second nature. Agency is a peculiar aspect of our second natures in that it requires us to conceive of ourselves in a certain way. In particular, it requires us to think of ourselves as agents. To attain agency we must be able to describe ourselves as engaging in some action, and to be able to do this, we must think of ourselves as agents. The reason for this, as G.E.M. Anscombe argues, is that in any case of intentional action, we must identify what we are doing without adverting to observation. If someone can only register what he is doing from observation, the question of why he is performing such an act can be refused application, and he cannot be said to be acting intentionally under such a description.¹³

¹⁰ John McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 170.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 179.

¹² Ibid., p. 189.

¹³ G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 49.

Describing ourselves as engaging in an action is just a special case of describing a living thing, and such descriptions, as Michael Thompson argues, require the background understanding of the human form of life. Human actions are the actions of a living thing, and all descriptions of living things require the background of a form of life. For example, we can represent the fact that a cat is taking a drink of milk only against norms of the life form that the cat instances: a form of life in which taking in liquids which have certain properties into a certain orifice amounts to taking a drink, and this is normally done to attain nourishment. The norms define what is supposed to happen next when the cat is aiming to take a drink. If, due to a hole in his throat, all the milk he laps spills out before making it to his stomach, something has gone wrong. A cat lacking the ability to take in nourishing liquids from its environment is understood as defective by such norms, since something essential to its mode of living, to its vital agency, is missing. Likewise, to understand human actions requires situating events against a background of norms for intentional actions. Hence, to understand human beings as agents requires, on this view, an understanding of the human form of life that incorporates norms for human action. The norms indicate what it is for a set of events to amount to an intentional action in a human being. We simply must have such insight in order to describe ourselves as engaged in intentional action, since, in order to be held as acting intentionally there must exist an awareness of the action, the description of which implies some picture of the human life form. What follows from this understanding is that if someone is an agent capable of intentional action, he must think of agency as a normal feature of the human life form. To describe a person as acting, which is a prerequisite for being able to act, requires placing the person against the background of a form of life in which certain events constitute the making of an action. Hence, the capacity to act on reasons is a norm for any being that conceives of itself as acting, which is a prerequisite for a being that in fact acts. From this perspective, a human being lacking agency is *ipso facto* a defective human being.

Inasmuch as the categorical proposition that human beings are agents cannot be the practically inert sort of categorical proposition which McDowell identifies, it is unlike the categorical proposition that human beings are social, which can be practically inert. We must conceive ourselves as agents in order to act, and in so conceiving ourselves, we take it to be an aspect of being good as a human being. It is an aspect of our nature that we must value in order to be agents. Therefore, the loss of agency must be recognized as bad, and not because of any instrumental cost which results from its loss. Its loss makes us defective as a human being, and it is this fact that makes it bad. It is important that we recognize the value of agency as a species norm. Although this does not mean that we must value the agency of others, it does mean that invariably there is reason to do so. The value of agency qualifies human practical rationality, such that to be rational, we must recognize the genuine force of reasons of justice.

3 Agency, Harm, and Practical Rationality

As Philippa Foot argues, ethical naturalism need not define the aim of a properly functioning practical rationality in terms of promoting survival and reproduction.

According to Foot, the standards of rationality derive from our standards for goodness of the will.¹⁴ On this view, our conception of practical rationality must fit within our overall conception of what is good for a human being. Foot believes that such an approach is implicit in our rejection of present-desire theories of reasons for action. We commonly think that someone who puts his future at risk for the sake of some trivial, transient desire is behaving foolishly. She writes: “Being unable to fit the supposed ‘reason’ into some preconceived present-desire-based theory of reasons for action, we do not query whether it really is a foolish way to behave, but rather hang onto the evaluation and shape our theory of reasons accordingly.”¹⁵ Hence, according to Foot, a background evaluative judgment sets the criteria for practical rationality.

Agency as an aspect of the human good plays an essential role in shaping what counts as practically rational. It is natural to think that agency, as an aspect what is good for a human being, must enter our practical thought as follows: recognizing that agency is a part of what is good for a human being, and wanting to be a good human being, we must then be concerned with preserving our own agency. To defend justice as a virtue, we must then show, by a further stretch of reasoning, that any agent must care about the interests of others in order to promote or preserve their agency. Such a view of rationality is an instrumental conception. The criteria for rationality are derived from preserving and promoting something that someone takes to be good, or essential, to something good that he wants to attain. In contrast, on the view we will begin to consider, we must realize that we are members of a species in which agency is normal, and this understanding of what is good for a human being frames what it is to be practically rational. As with Foot’s view, this view does not include a default perspective of a desire-fulfillment or instrumental theory of reasons for action. Instead, “practical rationality” is a term concerning virtues, which we use to praise reasoning when we respond to reasons appropriately, in a way that is constitutive of being good human beings. Being prudent through being responsive to our long-term interests is a constitutive element of being a good human being, and hence we praise such reasoning as rational.

Much as on Foot’s view we do not need to show that being responsive to reasons of our long-term interests conduces to fulfilling our desires, being just is not instrumental to achieving some good. Being just is a constitutive element of the human good because we are agents. Our conception of practical rationality must be compatible with our overall view of what is good for a human being. Practical rationality must fit with the fact that agency is an essential feature of human beings. As a result, we must be responsive to reasons of justice. More specifically, agency as an aspect of human nature supports a virtue of what may be called proto-justice in order to underline that the virtue is not a fleshed out conception of justice. Because agency is a normal feature of human beings, anything which damages our agency is bad, including actions, and actions which damage the agency of a person are *pro tanto* bad actions. While this is not a sufficient basis for deriving anything like a complete moral code, it lies within some basic norms of human life. This view can

¹⁴ Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

provide a deeper foundation for Philippa Foot's intuitive claim: "In human life it is an Aristotelian necessity (something on which our way of life depends) that if, for instance, a stranger should come on us when we are sleeping he will not think it all right to kill us or appropriate the tools that we need for the next day's work."¹⁶

The neo-Aristotelian case for proto-justice relies on some empirical insight into human life. Still, the relevant sort of empirical insight is not an inductive generalization. It is an interpretation of readily available facts organized by our understanding of the human life form. The possession and employment of this concept, which is necessary to be a self-conscious human being, make the empirical facts that support the reason-giving force of justice inescapably relevant to us. The reason-giving force of proto-justice is embedded in the grasp of a larger family of ethical concepts, including the concepts of harm and injury. Like other judgments regarding living things, judgments applying such concepts require the background of a life form which, in this case, is our own. In our life form, that background necessarily includes agency.

We also apply concepts of harm and injury to life forms that do not feature agency. Such cases involve an interpretative application of a life form concept. As Michael Thompson points out, the effect of a hydrogen bomb will be the same on a rose as on a roadbed of asphalt from a certain perspective, since both, at least at ground zero, will be turned to vapor.¹⁷ At the same time, the effect on a rose is different, since there is the interruption of a process for a rose. Whatever is supposed to happen next in a rose is interrupted because it is turned into vapor, whereas there is nothing that is supposed to happen next in asphalt. Likewise, it looks like a straightforward physical fact about human beings that we can be deformed and pulverized by repeated forceful swings of a baseball bat. Yet to register the full effect of a baseball bat hitting us requires looking at more than the physical effects of the blows on our flesh. Instead, we must register the interruptions of life processes that may be caused by such events. When we understand certain physical rearrangements of living matter as harming an organism, we apply the concept of a life form. The harm interferes with the vital agency of the organism. It interferes with the way in which an organism of the sort at issue lives, rendering it temporarily or permanently a defective member of its kind. To understand that harm has been committed, we apply our understanding of the life form to organize empirical content, and so gain access to judgments about living things including what harms them.¹⁸ Harm for us interferes with our vital operations, and in our case this includes our capacity for intentional action.

It might be objected that not all of our defects harm us. For example, someone might live a life of obesity without ever suffering any harm from the condition. Yet if the condition of obesity does not interfere with our vital operations, it is not clear that obesity is a defect in the sense at issue here. As Foot points out, not all abnormalities in a statistical sense are in fact defects. For example, a blue tit lacking the patch of blue on its head is abnormal, but not defective, since the patch of blue

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 114.

¹⁷ Michael Thompson, *Life and Action* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 40.

¹⁸ See Paul Benson, "Free Agency and Self Worth," *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 91, 1994.

apparently does not play a role in its characteristic life.¹⁹ If something is a defect in the sense that Foot and Thompson mean, then it does interfere with our vital operations and hence constitutes a harm.

Inflicting harms that introduce defects into the agency of a person is *pro tanto* bad. It may yet turn out that inflicting such harms is justified for the sake of promoting a sought out characteristic. This line of argument establishes a foundational value with which other putative values will have to be aligned. It is also important to stress that anyone who is rational must recognize this value inasmuch as she acquires reason. We could get to some point in our life without having realized that we are susceptible to physical or emotional harm. Yet our attainment of the species-typical capacity for agency via a reason-conferring upbringing commits us to the view that the observed loss of this capacity constitutes a defect. The concept of the human life form that we must grasp to be merely self-conscious informs our concept of harm, and makes the observed facts about possibilities of harm ineluctably relevant to us, as well.

4 Skepticism about Constitutivist Naturalism

The naturalistic view we are considering faces two significant lines of objection. One line comes from long-standing concerns about naturalism, and the other arises from new quarters in response to the constitutivist version of naturalism. Objecting to naturalism, Copp and Sobel argue that naturalism does not provide an adequate explanation of why we should care about our species membership. They suggest that it is possible to acknowledge that the failure to respond to reasons of justice, for example, makes someone defective as a human being, but that such a person can still shrug at this thought because he does not care about being a non-defective human being.

Part of the force of the objection of Copp and Sobel comes from a misunderstanding of the role that the category of being human plays in recent neo-Aristotelian thought. Copp and Sobel understand the concept of being human as a biological category employed in an empirical anthropology, whereas for neo-Aristotelians it is the concept of the life form of which we are members. For reasons we have considered, we cannot avoid having views about our own life form. It is clear that reasons cannot be derived from our membership within our biological species without the sort of mediation through our second nature that is described by McDowell. Yet, any reason-conferring second nature will confer agency, and in order to be an agent we must avow an interpretation of our life form according to which human beings are normally agents. We cannot be ignorant of or indifferent toward this fact while maintaining our agency, because this understanding of ourselves is constitutive of our capacity to act. On this interpretation, we must acknowledge, for example, that it is normal for human beings to have undiminished physical capacities and freedom from interference in the exercise of their agency, and conversely that physical harm and interference are *pro tanto* bad. To deny this

¹⁹ Foot, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

would be to affirm an interpretation of the human life form incompatible with our agency. Therefore, to the extent that we do not acknowledge the *pro tanto* badness of the forms of injustice at issue, we are defective agents. Reasons of justice are reasons that must have force with us if we acknowledge ourselves to be agents and have minimally accurate insight into our vulnerabilities.

Even if an avowal of belonging to a form of life that includes a capacity for agency is unavoidable, some philosophers might still deny that reasons grounded on this fact make any genuine claim on us. Enoch raises concerns about similar claims made by Kantian constitutivists. He argues that the inescapability of an activity does not imply that the norms of the activity have any claim on us. He writes: “Think ... about finding yourself playing a game of chess, and assume for now that for some reason you cannot quit – not that you *should* not quit but that you *cannot* quit. And assume that sacrificing a pawn is the thing you have most chess-related reason to do (it best promotes your chances of checkmating your opponent or some such). Well, do you have a reason to sacrifice a pawn? Not, it seems to me, if you don’t have a normative reason to play or win the game, and this even if you can’t quit. For you can continue playing or ‘going through the motions,’ grudgingly, refusing to internalize the aims of the game. And absent some normative reason to play the game, there need be nothing irrational about such an attitude.”²⁰ Enoch does not believe that the Kantian constitutivists, in fact, produce a normative reason to play or win the game, and concludes that unless the Kantians produce normative reasons to act, our agency does not produce reasons on its own and cannot ground normativity.

It would seem that the neo-Aristotelian argument we are considering must fall to the same objection. After all, on the neo-Aristotelian position, justice is a standard internal to human action, and since we cannot escape being human and acting, we must be just. In that case, as Enoch suggests, we can be indifferent to our humanity and our capacity for action. Yet the neo-Aristotelian argument differs from the Kantian constitutivist argument in a way that gives the neo-Aristotelian a distinctive line of response to Enoch’s argument. Enoch’s objection rests on the possibility, which Kantians leave open, of a detached contemplation of the fact of our being agents, and that we therefore require a reason to play the game of agency. This is a mistake. We cannot know ourselves as having a capacity for agency without having been motivated to act on some reason. It follows that nobody can be neutral toward such a capacity, except in a pathological frame of mind that impairs the person’s agency, such as severe depression. All agents must view the capacity as normal for human beings and avow this interpretation as their own. This makes the standard applied to each agent as a being for whom agency is normal necessarily more than a mere theoretical fact among others. Likewise, the possibility of harm or interference with agency cannot be regarded with detached theoretical neutrality. Facts about our susceptibility to harm take on an inescapable relevance through the interpretation of our life form that every agent necessarily avows. Awareness of our agency and susceptibility to harm come as a unified package, at least for human beings, and the fact that there is, on this view, no theoretically neutral territory from which to

²⁰ Enoch, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

contemplate our agency, leaves a skeptic such as Enoch considers without any proper footing.

Enoch might offer a reply through questioning the force of the judgment that someone is defective. The objection gets its apparent force from the fact that the term “defect” points to an objective feature of a person that he can seemingly shrug off. Yet, as we have seen, defects are not mere statistical abnormalities; they prevent the bearer of the defect from living a characteristic life for the sort of organism he is. While a defect in this sense is still something that could possibly be ignored, the defects at issue are distinctive from other defects in two ways. They affect the ability to act on reasons, which is something toward which we cannot be indifferent. In addition, the defects at issue stems from a failure to adopt ends that are consistent with our necessary acknowledgment of our own agency. In the case of moral defects, we are the cause of our own defectiveness. In cases in which someone acts against proto-justice, the person acts against reasons he has to value, and the reasons have some motivational force with every self-conscious human agent. Some morally defective agents can claim with some legitimacy to be indifferent to such facts, and when they do so, they are shameless. As Foot points out, this is a phenomenon like weakness of will for which we should leave room in our moral psychology. Yet there is no question of the stance being a rational response to the view we are considering. Likewise, if Enoch is expressing genuine apathy to the view we are considering that is practical and not merely theoretical, he is confessing shamelessness and defectiveness as an agent.

It might seem that this response is open to Kantian constitutivists. Yet there is an important distinction between the two varieties of constitutivism. Korsgaard claims that we are “*condemned* to choice and action” and, as Enoch points out, it does not follow from such condemnation to act that we are to take such power as something that is itself reason-giving.²¹ Where Kantians emphasize the inevitability of acting, the neo-Aristotelian view is that we only become aware of our agency under conditions within which it is seen as something to be embraced as normal, as part of the interpretation of humanity that we employ in acting to achieve whatever goals we happen to care about. Kantian constitutivists want to arrive at the same conclusion, but they could only be entitled to arrive at the conclusion through accepting the Aristotelian view that agency is inseparable from human nature and seeing moral goodness as a matter of human goodness. If the neo-Aristotelian argument is correct, to experience our agency as a condemnation is only possible as a derivative pathology state. It will be a product of developing vicious dispositions, which generate attitudes at odds with norms of humanity, or else the product of falling prey to a paralyzing pathological state. At any rate, we must experience our agency in the first instance as normal in a way that generates reasons.

It may seem that Kantians could embrace the Aristotelian views of agency that yield this conclusion. Yet they could not do so without giving up the core commitments that make them Kantian. To embrace Aristotelian views of agency would mean acknowledging that species-level norms are the highest level of generality applicable to practical norms. This commitment leaves no room for the

²¹ Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, op. cit., p. 1.

idea of the categorical imperative as a practical norm applicable to all rational beings, whatever their life form.

The norms of proto-justice being are inescapable for human agents. The type of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism that we have considered is grounded on self-knowledge of a sort that we necessarily possess as agents. Despite the similarities with Kantian constitutivism, there remains a significant source of disagreement between neo-Aristotelians and Kantians due to the role of the human life form in the former account. There are reasons to affirm that despite its distance from empirically-oriented ethical naturalism, the type of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism that we have considered does not merely fold into Kantian non-naturalism.²²

²² I would like to thank Erin Flynn, four anonymous referees, Thomas Magnell, Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal for Value Inquiry*, and Debra Lawson for their very helpful comments and assistance.