Relational Moral Agency

Beyond Constructivism and Naturalism*

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Introduction

The dichotomy between human and nature is often cited by environmentalists as one of the main crimes resulting from the predominant Western worldview. The most destructive element in this dichotomy is, from the viewpoint of environmental ethics, the idea that it entails the boarders of moral domain: humans should be taken morally into account on their own right, while other natural entities are just instrumentally relevant for moral. [1] Therefore, much of the theoretically oriented environmental ethics has been focused on searching for one or another way out of this dichotomy.

There are, roughly said, two ways to overcome the dichotomy between human members of the moral community and the other beings not having access to the domain of morally relevant things on their own behalf: (1) showing that the others share some property of moral relevance with human agents, or (2) giving up with the exceptionality of humans as moral subjects. The latter – namely an argument against the exceptionality of moral agency that is praised in modern ethics as a necessary condition for values and responsibility – has been put forward by two approaches of philosophical anthropology: social constructivism and naturalism.

In this chapter I will introduce some key points of criticism against the modernist conception of moral agency posed by ecofeminists on the one hand, and by evolutionary ethicists on the other hand. I argue that there are parallel interests included in these ecologically oriented modest forms of constructivism and naturalism to seek for a conception of moral agency

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[1] According to mainstream ethics, the terms of binding and serious obligations – such as duty, right, law, and justice – always holds true within the community of free and rational agents and incapable of dealing with human-nature relationships. As John Rawls remarks, "we should recall here the limits of a theory of justice. [… N]o account can be given of right conduct in regard to animals and the rest of nature". Rawls, 512. Kant states that in spite of not having direct duties towards non-rational beings, we have "indirect duties" not to harm them: accepting ill-treating of animals would lead to cruelty against other humans, too. Kant (1992), 443, 238. So, we should respect others insofar they include, by analogy "manifestations of human nature". Kant (1963), 239.

beyond the hardwired constructivist and naturalist explanations. Both lines of thought seem to aim at some sort of *relational conception of human moral agency*.[2]

Against the praised exceptionality of moral agents

During the last four decades, much of environmental ethics has aspired to justify that nature, or some other than humans, normatively count to human moral agents as moral objects, because they share with the human agents something which makes them equally relevant in ethics, however, in their own way. The criterion for something to have moral status has therefore been among the most popular topics in the discussion.[3] Despite the differences, these arguments extend the originally Kantian idea of moral status as something inherent in object, independent from its relationship with the agent or from other contextual features, like place, for example.[4] They see the task for environmental ethics in reshaping the domain of morality by arguing that some individual/systemic objects of nature meet the objective criteria for moral standing. Extensions of the Kantian perspective, however, imply that at the centre there is a moral *agent* who *best* can meet the criteria, and around him other entities that can, in some extent, meet *the same* criteria. While defending the lack of significant difference between human and nature, they happen to insist that there is an isolatable measure of moral significance. And an adult human moral agent stands for that measure. The same features that guarantee the exceptional status for human beings as moral agents (intentionality, autonomy, free will, rationality, self-realization etc.) remain in their modest forms as the criteria for which beings deserve moral consideration. Several recent approaches of environmental philosophy criticize this kind of liberal foundations in environmental ethics as individualistic, too limited, monistic, and human centred.[5] But in addition to this, they argue, this type of argumentation implies a destructive conception of human moral agent, too.[6] In short, it is bound to the modernist presumptions that are seen as responsible for making ethics incapable of dealing with the relationship between humans and the material world in moral terms.[7]

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[2] Several approaches attempt to parallel feminist and Darwinist notions of relationality. See S. Harding and M. Hintikka (eds.), Discovering reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science (Kluwer 2003), and Elizabeth Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism, (Indiana University Press 1994), and Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power (Duke University Press 2005).

[3] Arguments for the moral status of nature are mainly individualistic. According to them, nonhuman individuals capable of having interests (Peter Singer), capable of being subjects of their own life (Tom Regan), or capable of pursuing life (Kenneth Goodpaster) deserve moral status and the respect of moral agents. See e. g. Singer, 56, Regan, 199-200, and Goodpaster, 308-25. Despite being the usual structure of individualist arguments, the idea of moral status depended on criteria derived from an ideal moral agency has been adopted at least partly by some holistic arguments, too. For example James Lovelock argues for the respect for Gaia by describing it as an intentional being. Gaia is the measure of value just as humans are thought to be in modern ethics.

[4] See e. g. Christopher J. Preston, Grounding Knowledge: Environmental Philosophy, Epistemology, and Place (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press 2003).

[5] For example Cuomo, 92-94, 101-102; Plumwood (1993), 131. Plumwood argues for continuity between mind and nature on the basis of intentionality speared in nature, but she explicitly denies that this works as a similarity criterion. Intentionality "provides a way to realise continuity without assimilation". It does not allow argument for moral consideration on ground of similarity, "[b]ecause intentional systems are differentiated in terms of kind rather than of degree of variation along the same axis." Plumwood (1993), 132.

[6] Cuomo, 95-97; Plumwood (1993), 22.

7 Recent environmental ethicists mainly find anthropocentrism not as problematic as the modernist presuppositions concerning human nature and agency. In addition to environmental virtue ethics and

Environmental ethics has a problem: in seeking a universally plausible justification to take environmental relations seriously, it rejects the serious relevance of these relations to the moral agent. It reasserts an environmentally harmful view of human nature, when sticking to the predominantly acceptable method of justification that conceives moral principles as expressions of legislative will. The authority of principles and moral codes thus rests on the sovereignty or supremacy of those who exercise free will. Modern examples of this kind of position are, of course, Kantian formalism and contractarianism, especially the wide reflective equilibrium formulated by Rawls. Contractarian theory, for example, allows a plurality of values, but seeks a rational agreement on principles interpreted as ideal terms of social cooperation. Justification concerns the procedure of accepting these principles, while justified principles derive from the instrumental rationality of human moral agents. In spite of the included value pluralism, at the level of justification, rational acceptance of the procedure entails universal – or at least wide agreement. This kind of tradition has the link with its predecessor in theological ethics, divine command theory, through which it is connected to the historical tradition that strongly differentiates between rationality and will. Divine command theory made an important distinction between God's intelligence and God's will, and stressed the will as the one setting the moral ends. For this reason, in modern ethics, free will is appreciated as the core of being moral. Reasoning concerns the right procedure and cooperation between those who put, for example, moral ends into the world by their will. Modern ethics widely holds values and norms as issues of subjective free will and autonomous rationality. It opposes *subjectivity* of morally relevant actions with the world's *objective* facts.[8]

This forms, I think, a historical background for recent aspirations toward revising the concept of moral agency. Can a human being – or should she – meet the modernist criteria for being a moral agent? Several approaches of radical environmentalism argue against the modernist presuppositions and the limited structure of modernist ethical argumentation. They question the nature of moral activity as absolutely free and individually subjective. A careful analysis and revised understanding of human rationality and will in relational vocabulary, would offer a vital new toolbox for environmental ethics.

Hope for a third way

Social constructivist and *naturalist* views in philosophical anthropology direct their criticism – from the opposite directions – against the unique human ability to transcend the world of facts. In their hardwired forms constructivism and naturalism find humans as results of natural and/or social processes. Moral behaviour is explainable by theories of either social or natural science. Their argument against the sharp dichotomy between facts and values, and between active subjectivity (of a moral agent) and passive objectivity (of body and the rest of nature), are welcomed by several recent environmental ethicists.[9] How can we distinguish between *moral agency* and the *nature* of moral agents? What is the link between humanity that is

ecofeminism, see e. g. Andrew Brennan's seminal work introducing a kind of eco-humanism, Thinking About Nature: An Investigation of Nature, Value and Ecology (London: Routledge 1988).

[8] Dichotomy between subjective activity (like knowing) and objects of that activity (like objects of knowledge) originates especially in Cartesian scepticism and entailing mind-body dualism.

[9] Ecofeminist and environmental virtue ethicists have common aims with various arguments searching for a new type of naturalism: cognitive science, modified natural law ethics (see Graig Boyd, A Shared Morality: A Narrative Defence of Natural Law Ethics, Grand Rapids: Brazos Press 2007; Robert McShea, Morality and Human Nature: A New Route to Ethical Theory, Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1990) and others (e. g. David Copp, "A Skeptical Challenge to Moral Non-naturalism and a Defence of Constructivist Naturalism", Philosophical Studies 126, 2005, 269–283).

relative to other animals and humanity that is divine, shares universal rationality and is objective in moral deliberation?

Environmental ethicists mainly keep on defending *moral realism,* but at the same time, they seek philosophically and scientifically sound account of human nature. During the last decades, several scientific explanations, both social and evolutionary, have *challenged traditional moral realism* with reductionist explanations of moral behaviour, particular moral codes, or morality in general. A project of naturalizing human agency – as an alternative to the project of subjectivizing the objects of nature – entails problems for ethics: If human beings are not unique, how can they be moral agents responsible for their actions? If posing a contextual view of moral agency, we need to keep in mind that there is a threat of ending up *relativism*. I argue that the problems concern first of all the *reductionist* forms of naturalism and constructivism, while their *non-reductionist* forms may offer viable insights for taking ecology serious in ethics. While without being unproblematic I agree with those resent environmental ethicists who argue that resolving modernist presumptions concerning moral agency is a prerequisite for understanding the difficulties of modern ethics to seriously deal with the relationship between human agents and the material world in moral terms. This, I think, is the aim of many ecofeminists, as well as of some non-reductionist naturalists. However, their common agenda of revising the concept of moral agency has not yet been clearly articulated

An American ecofeminist theologian Anna Peterson has classified anthropological views of environmental ethical theories into four groups. In her classification *human exceptionalism*, *social constructionism* and *sociobiological anthropology* seem to form the three angles of a "triangle". But she argues that there are ecofeminist views that cannot be classified to any of these groups. They are originally constructionist, but they share some ideas with evolutionary naturalism, and therefore, they do not oppose exceptional view as sharply as the hardwired constructionism. Peterson calls this view as *chastened constructionism*.[10] Chastened constructionism as a term for ecofeminist anthropology refers to a feminist view that takes biologically oriented viewpoints seriously and stresses that bodily and mental activities are profoundly interrelated. Naturalists, on their part, seem sometimes to move toward taking constructivism more seriously. The term *non-reductive naturalism* refers to the kind of naturalist view that denies reductionist explanations of morality. These views are more open to give weight to social interaction, too. Hence, in some of their chastened forms constructivism and naturalism seem to have commonalities concerning human agency: they endeavour to overcome human superiority over the rest of nature by questioning the modern idea of an ultimate freedom of will, objective rationality and individualistic account of autonomy. Both stress the role of contextual and relational features as constitutive, not just external, for moral agency. According to them, the idea that a moral agent is, in theory, isolatable from the social, contextual and natural determinants which remain external influences in moral deliberation, should be rejected and a sharp distinction between the subjective activity and the objective "happening" should be questioned.[11] Many feminists and socio-biologists also share the aspiration for an anti-essentialism. But they disagree as to

[10] Peterson, 209-212. Somewhat similar views are defended as "constrained constructionism" (Katherine Hayle, "Searching for Common Ground", Michael Soulé & Gary Lease (eds.), *Reinventing Nature? Responces to Postmodern Deconstruction,* Washington D.C.: Island Press 1995), and "non-reductive realism" (Kate Soper, *What is Nature?* Oxford: Blackwell 1995).

[11] This criticism entails wider and deeper influences in environmental ethics than can be dealt with in this book. As an example of what it could mean for the concept of nature and what kind of theoretical issues it would pose for environmental ethics, see Patric Cyrry's articles "Post-secular Nature: Principles and Politics" in: *Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion* 11, 2007, 284-304, and "Nature Post-Nature" in: *New Formations* 26, 2008, 51-64.

whether the conceptual categories of beings are results of cultural activity or natural evolution.[12]

Notwithstanding the fundamental differences between feminism and evolutionary naturalism there are both ecologically oriented constructionists and evolutionary naturalists who seem to aim at the "third way" in a parallel way. It is not possible to straightforwardly juxtapose these traditions, however, since they still often see each others as enemies.[13] But even though they do not converge, they seem to share a tentative idea which I call *a relational approach*. In dialogue they could, therefore, help in sketching what it would mean for ethics to understand human moral agency in relational vocabulary. A *relational* conception of moral agency could, I suppose, also have an advantage over the reductionist conceptions in order to avoid the threat of relativism. But it requires that we can get beyond the hardwired forms of constructionism and naturalism.[14]

Chastened constructionism in ecofeminism – moral agency in ecofeminism

Social constructionism denies the idea of essential human nature. Culturally formed interactions between individuals and their social environments are constitutive to what it is to be human.[15] Humanity as a concept refers to a diversity of particular kinds of being human, rather than to one universally shared idea.[16] Feminists widely share that conceptual definitions of human beings (for example "man", "woman" or "Arab") have no universal meaning. In social life, factual differences generate social oppression only if we believe in "pure, true human nature."[17] Appreciation of diversity not just in the nonhuman world, but also among human agents, is central for ecofeminism, too. If socially formulated conceptions are held as essential, they entail a "logic of domination", which maintains subordination in relationships both between humans and between humans and nature.[18] Authentic differences remain in a moral relationship, which makes it impossible to ground our morality on criteria of "sameness". Being human "essentially" is being and acting in relation to different others. "Being human" never can be found in isolation, rather it is always being human in the

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[12] Constructionism reduces all categories into cultural, conceptual and symbolic structures. Peterson, 76. Sociobiology, on the contrary, sticks to the realist idea of the "world out there", also in the case of human manifestations. Plurality is not due to conceptualization, but diversity is interpreted as a factual thing resulting from evolutionary processes of adaptation.

[13] Plumwood (1993), 121-122. The attacks are directed, however, towards the hardwired versions.

[14] It is impossible to do justice to all aspects of the wide traditions here. But if I am right and the modest forms could together inseminate a plausible view of relational moral agency, the resultant view would also help in overcoming the dichotomy between absolute realism and total relativism. According to Richard Bernstein, the modernist conception of moral agency is decisive for the strict dichotomizing between objectivism and relativism in modern ethics. Bernstein uses the hermeneutic conceptions of agency in order to show that the dichotomy does not apply. Nancy Hartsock argues that the feminist standpoint theory aims at the same direction with Bernstein. Hartsock, 249-50; Bernstein, 1-9; see also Haraway, 191-192, and Hekman, 47-48.

[15] Berger and Luckmann, 183; Geertz, 35, 53.

[16] Peterson, 52-53.

[17] Hekmann, 85; Cuomo, 114; Peterson, 54; Henriksen, 67; Mellor, 161, 178. 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.

[18] Plumwood (1993), 55-59; Mellor, 115.

world.[19] This "truth" of humanity is important in ethics: if we give up differences, we bring about polarization, value-dualism and oppression.[20]

According to feminist view in general, and ecofeminism in particular, moral self is first of all a "self-in-relationship".[21] On the contrary to this, the mainstream view is that contextual relations are externally influential in moral deliberation, but not constitutive to a moral agent, who remains exceptionally rational, autonomous and impartial – able to ignore his or her personal viewpoint in moral considerations. For this view, individual impartiality and neutral universality are necessary for morality: It is good to take care of one's own children, but while connected with personal emotions and relations this cannot be evaluated as morally good. Morality should be founded on rationally justified standards only.[22] An ecofeminist Val Plumwood argues that theories regarding bodily, social and ecological particularities as irrelevant to morality exemplify the attempt to rule and control these particularities by superior, "interest-free" and "masculine" reason, which in fact is a fake. An attempt to seek harmony with nature is fundamentally incoherent within this very framework that has alienated us from nature.

Material and social relationships as well as the practices of everyday life, are not just contingent for being human or representing moral agency. But, on the contrary to some other feminist views, ecofeminists pose that this does not entail relativism. With regard to the dominant and extreme constructivist conceptions of a moral agent, ecofeminism locates the problematic dualism between the "human" and "natural" inside the human being. The split is made within the moral agent. An ideal and authentic agency has been defined as opposite to natural, physical or biological reality, while the body – thought of as belonging to the determined physical reality – has been neglected as a constitutive part of a moral agent.[23] Conceptual rethinking should bring about the repositioning of the excluded and despised features of humanity (feminine, particular, relational or emotional) as active parts of authentic moral agency. As social and material determinants are not rejected as constitutive elements of a moral agent, they can form a bridge which restores the continuity between humanity and nature without losing the value of "difference".[24] Taking the inside "nature" of moral agency seriously "softens" the feminist criticism against anti-essentialism, but at the same time, it can strengthen its plausibility.[25]

Ecofeminists criticize some other modes of feminism about world alienation. On the contrary to the extremely constructionist forms of social or postmodern feminism, ecofeminists are more careful in their anti-essentialist criticism. They stress that biological and ecological relationships and processes should be regarded, besides the social and cultural ones, as determinants for moral agency.[26] According to Mary Mellor and Bonnie Mann, for example,

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[19] "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." Warren (1990), 143.

[20] Warren (2000), 105.

[21] Hekman, 120; Warren (2000), 90.

[22] Environmental ethics has often adopted this view, too. See e.g. Taylor, 85-86.

[23] Plumwood (1994), 146-147; Warren (2000), 90.

[24] Plumwood (1994), 154.

[25] Relational ethics entailing "a softened" anti-essentialism is for many, I suppose, more plausible than relativism entailing hardwired constructivism.

[26] The material conditions, dependences and limits form the universal element which, in a negative sense, connects all humanity with nature. It can be interpreted, thus, as a middle way position between essentially naturalist and totally constructivist view. Mary Mellor's ecofeminism, for example, attacks against postmodernist feminism by "immanent realism", which has also interesting epistemological impacts. Mellor, 184-187. It is not hard to see the connection between ecofeminism and the recent

this does not mean that we should give up moral autonomy or responsibility. However, postmodern tendency of overcoming biological necessities is just a continuation of the "Euro-masculine tradition" that has justified the manner of male supremacy by attaching women to the realm of necessity.[27] Mann argues that postmodern linguistic turn works as emancipation that moves the borderline between "free" and "necessary" in a way that there is nothing left outside the discursive universe.[28] "Emancipation", that now takes place not in metaphysics but in discourse, stresses "the subject's destiny as a free subject", just as Kant did.[29] It does not help us against the view of moral agency as free from biology, ontology, intransigent social structures, and the referentiality of language. According to Mann, feminism should both continue protesting against the association of women with the realm of necessity and protest against the "dissociation of human beings in general from this realm."[30] Although she does not make the explicit link, some of Mann's notions seem to tend turning feminism as a partner of evolutionary naturalism. Besides being a necessity, she argues, our dependence on earth, connecting us to all of our relationships, has other aspects which we should elevate and re-value, especially that of productivity. [31] The earth is not our prison, but a *productive place* we inhabit, that constitutes and enlivens us moment by moment. 'Freedom' from the earth, from this perspective, is suicidal."[32]

According to Mary Midgley, the problem of constructionism originates in the implied "blank paper" theory of human nature, according to which humanness in total can be reduced to social and conceptual influences after birth.[33] There is nothing "out there" but an empty landscape out of which human identity is constructed by conceptualization into which all intentionality and behaviour can be reduced. "Freedom" from biological necessities in extreme constructivism, may fall just to another version of determinism. Midgley and Peterson, among others, argue that anti-essentialism may be as reductive as essentialism. Reduction into conceptualization also separates human beings from other animals, and it could be condemned as an exceptionalist view, that environmental ethics wished to attack by adopting constructionism.[34] For ecofeminism, the earth is not just text. Besides being the fact that all conceptions, description and modes of knowing depend on how they are

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virtue ethicist tendencies. See e. g. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need Virtues* (Chicago, La Salle: Open Court 1999).

[27] She argues against "freedom as emancipation". The realm or determination is always part of human "freedom" that should be seen as freedom in relation to certain necessities.

[28] If the borderline is seen as the one between mind and body, the problematic dualism is solved in this view by denying the body-side. Social necessities are, or course, acknowledged.

[29] Mann, 53-54.

[30] Mann, 57-58. In Love's labour: Essays on women, equality, and dependency (New York: Routledge 1999) Eva Kittay takes the universality of human condition of dependence as a basis for her ethics of care. Experience of dependence is the place from which we can know what is essential for justice and good social policy. Also our relationship to nature is something we can know and articulate only from the "place" of our dependence on the earth.

[31] An ecofeminist understanding of the relationship with physical realm 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 as not something that just bounds or limits, rather also produces the subject, "the paradox of freedom and necessity can be reworked on a material level." Mann, 59.

[32] Mann 2005, 60.

[33] Midgley sees the roots of this view in 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 behaviorism John B. Watson was the first to formulate it in an extreme mode which denies all human instincts. Midgley (1978), 19.

[34] Peterson, 73. See also e.g. Midgley (2004), 137,141.

conceptualized, prescriptions and normative claims depend on the non-conceptualized conditions for conceptualizing.[35]

Ecofeminism, gaining much from ecological science, stresses the nature of all determinants as relations rather than substantial properties. Relations never neither constructed nor given, neither free nor determined. According to an ecofeminist account of relational moral agency, the necessities are seen as relations or relational features, such as gender, place, race, religion, social class, friends and opportunities. They all shape our way of being "autonomous" as well as our being "rational". All modes of knowing, possible for the human agent, are relational. That does not, however, at least *not* necessarily, entail *relativism*.[36] One of the ecofeminist relatives to feminist standpoint theory is "immanent critical realism" defended by Mary Mellor. It is an attempt to understand the relationship between human mental activity and truth from an ecofeminist perspective.[37] Feminist standpoint theory does not deny, and neither does immanent critical realism, the possibility of ontological realism – at least not in its dynamic version – but it denies that any individual or a group could reach the truth of it, neither in the sense of scientific critical realism, nor metaphysical theories. Human dependencies entail real partiality, and therefore, "[a]wereness of the radical uncertainty of human immanence should be the starting point of all other knowledge."[38]

According to the relational (ecofeminist) view of moral agency, sufficient conception of *autonomy* does not require the existence of free, isolated atoms.[39] The idea of abstract individualism, namely the human self as independently autonomous, should be rejected. Relational accounts of moral responsibility move beyond the idea of responsibility as individual to the view of responsibility as a *collective* thing, too. Also other ethical concepts, such as interests and well-being, consist of inter-relative, social elements. The scope of responsibility covers, therefore, one's responsibility for her character and her practical relationships, rather than just acts.[40] Relationality is both fact and a value: The only autonomy one can have is relative to the environments we are embedded in, a contextual and relational autonomy.[41] But much depends on how it is conceptualized. We could think our human autonomy as neutral, impartial or objective, but by that, we would authorize its domination over the embedded ones.

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35 According to *Ruth Anna Putnam*, for example, descriptions and normative prescriptions have to use the same vocabulary. These form two separate, but interconnected spirals – perhaps towards the truth. Putnam, R. A., "Perceiving Facts and Values", Philosophy 73/ 283, 1998, 17-18.

36 The most notable example of feminist discussions on truths and reality is the one around the feminist standpoint theory, originally formulated by Sandra Harding, and developed by Nancy Hartsock and Donna Haraway. About truth about biological and material reality in standpoint theory, see Harding, 269-270, 284-286, Hartsock 229, 234-236, 244-245, Haraway (1990). According to Harding, approaching the truth is more likely when the experiences of the marginalized are given more emphasis than the experiences of those in power. The standpoint theory has important implications in ethics: Oppression and subordination is wrong for epistemological reasons, too: Giving priority to any fixed definition or appearance of humanity (in particular the dominant one) would weaken the truth-value of the concept by limiting the range of experiences. Conceptual definitions of humanity always depend on perspective, but the dominant cultures have often used an essentialist conception of humanness as a weapon against other racial, sexual or cultural groups. See also Hekman, 86-90.

37 Mellor, 185-188. Mellor is influenced by Murray Bookchin's social ecology.

38 Mellor is suspicious of the human possibility to reach the truth, but also to attain harmony with nature. Mellor 187-188.

39 Cuomo, 99; Meyers, 49-50. This view is not, however, restricted in feminist discourse. See Henriksen, 57-59.

40 Brennan, 873-874.

41 Mackenzie & Stoljar; Cuomo, 132.

Ecofeminists are well aware of the possible threat that the antirealism included in extreme versions of constructionism might cause for environmental ethics.[42] This might be the reason, why so many ecofeminists seem to aim to overcome the dichotomy between constructivism and naturalism. Various "materialist" ecofeminists mix feminism with certain views derived from evolutionary and ecological sciences in order to respect the idea of humanity tied both to place and time. They question both individual, absolute autonomy and reductionism. They want to stress biological and material as well as social and cultural context – without falling into determinism. I argue that ecofeminist concept of "relationality" (including all kinds of relations, material, social and other) could substitute for "discourse". Relations do not just exist rather they come to exist and are profoundly modified by acting and communicating in the relationship. Ecofeminist view may include features from both naturalism and constructivism. Actually, dichotomies between traditional positions, constructionism and naturalism, seem not to hold when a relational revision of the concept of moral agency, which ecofeminists seem to aim for, is used.

Moral agency and non-reductionist naturalism

Moral agency as exceptional has been constant target of criticism among *evolutionary scientists*. Sociobiology explains human behaviour, including nurturing, culture and morals, mostly by the interaction between genes and the environment.[43] According to the critics, sociobiology is deterministic, it denies moral autonomy and responsibility, and reduces ethics to biology.[44] The critics (most notably feminist philosophers) argue that its conception of human nature strengthens the essentialist view: characteristics profitable for evolutionary fitness are essentially better than others. The whole outlook is restorative for oppressive practices. Despite the philosophical debates on the issue and the problems in including evolutionary biology in philosophical discussions, it is not possible, today, to dismiss evolutionary explanations of moral behaviour, neither is it wise because of the potentialities it might offer for redirecting ethical discussions after the hard modernist doctrines.

Evolutionary ethics, in general, attempts to take science seriously. What they mainly assert are the *scientific explanations* of moral behaviour or ethical systems, not *normative justifications*. However, explanations of human nature, interests, sentiments and intentions, as well as capacities of a moral agent are not meaningless from the viewpoint of justification.[45] For example ethical rationalism, defended by Kant and Rawls, as well as emotivism, defended by Stevenson, both are based on a conception of an individually autonomous agent: The actions that are normatively evaluable are actions that an individual agent has freely chosen to do.[46] Therefore, it is nearly impossible to claim someone being at fault for structural injustice

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[42] As examples of explicit ecofeminist arguments against antirealism, see Midgley (2004), 29-32; Midgley (1994), 58-59; Peterson, 57; Mann.

[43] Wilson, 17.

[44] In particular, Richard Dawkins's *The Selfish Gene* (1976) opened up a critical debate on sociobiology, and indeed strengthened the constructionists' fight against essentialism that legitimizes unequal socioeconomic structures.

[45] Notwithstanding the lack of justification, explanatory theories (both those focusing on cultural, practical and political power structures and those focusing on evolutionary mechanisms in explanations) have normative power. Especially if seen as relationships, both cultural and natural determinants are interrelated with the factual choices of an agent. By choosing in what relationships an agent is active, he chooses what traits of his character are strengthened.

[46] Freedom, here, is reduced either to the rationality or to the will independent from both physical determinants and socially mediated conducts. E.g. Midgley (1994), 152-153.

or for maintaining and transmitting destructive cultural traditions by education. Descriptions and prescriptions about the human action and character are not far from each other.

The question for evolutionary naturalism concerns freedom of action and the *prerequisites of responsibility*. Evolutionary ethicists can be roughly divided into two groups in this case. Reductionists explain moral capacity (or inclination for altruism) as a direct result of survival-oriented natural selection, while non-reductionists argue that freedom can be defended against fatalism without denying that all major human motives are innate. Non-reductionists argue for evolutionary explanation of general morality without reducing normative concepts into survival mechanisms; morality fundamentally means giving without hope of reward. [47] Sociobiologists after E. O. Wilson's *Sociobiology* (1975) mainly deny that selfishness as such is profitable for evolution. They argue that a complex moral system – based on socially formulated altruist claims – brings about "the best" environment for the genes of an individual human to survive in.[48] Social conducts are not independent from explanations derived from evolutionary mechanisms even though they are not substantially reducible to them. On a meta-level Wilson's theory is, however, a reductionist one: Morality is justified by the study of genetics; it is "morality of the gene". Our natural inclination is to believe in morality for the sake of genetic evolution.[49] Wilson believes that evolution, social behaviour and ethics included, ultimately work for progress.[50]

Evolution is about biological productivity, but not, contrary to the view of traditional evolutionary ethicists (Julian Huxley and Wilson), about progression. Evolutionary mechanisms are not directed towards always better or more valuable forms of life, and they do not have motivational power.[51] *Motivation* is more a relational thing, and therefore, it can be actively degenerated. Non-reductionist distinguishes more clearly between the interconnected evolutionary and cultural processes: it is due to human cultural practices that we commit ourselves to respecting morality, and mediate behavioural codes and beliefs to each others. However, the mechanisms of biological and cultural evolution are working, and they are changing our capacity of moral agency – to one or another direction. If the most reductionist explanations are dismissed, one cannot avoid facing an ultimate responsibility – not just for one's own actions but rather for collective practices, too.

A non-reductionist approach of moral agency can be interpreted to argue that human agency modifies – in amounts that it can choose – also the direction of evolution. Human cultural practices and actual moral conduct have an influence on the course of biological evolution.[52] Natural *causality*, moral *inclinations* and an (teleological) orientation based on the *hope* for something not yet realized can be seen to constitute a *spiral of intention:* embodied and embedded human nature modifies the moral agent who, together with the other agents,

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[47] Midgley (1979); Midgley (1984), 74. Another type of non-reductionist view, See Waller, 541.

[48] Ruse (1999), 174; Farber, 152.

[49] Sociobiology favors meta-ethical theories like that of John Mackie's error theory. Human species has evolved to co-operate by the successful mechanisms of morality. This unique and internally motivating system connects people with each other. But the whole system of morality has emerged to serve survival. "[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." Ruse and Wilson, 316; see also Ruse (1999), 176.

[50] Ruse (1999), 185, 188, 190-191; Wilson, 201. Michael Ruse argues *ad hominen* against Wilson that this is his way to reformulate his deep religious faith into the scientific model for modern age. According to Ruse, Wilson's *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* is as progressionist as Julian Huxley's *Evolution: The Modern Synthesis.*

[51] Ruse (2009), 6-9. Naturalists debate also on whether the "narrative" of evolution is that of causality, or not. An environmental ethicist Holmes Rolston III defends an idea of narratively meaningful evolution. Rolston, 279-280.

[52] Ruse (1985), 210. Cf. note 36.

influences future human nature through evolution. Darwinism does not deny that we ought to try to be autonomous and altruistic, although behaviour always remains partly determined.[53] This can be seen as echoing interestingly an aspect of Christian anthropology: humans are compelled to morality, but fail in choosing what is right. According to Michael Ruse, sociobiology needs not use full-blooded determinism, but rather include a dimension of autonomy as a self-corrective mechanism.[54] Moral sentiments are naturally evolved, but we need to distinguish between this biologically profitable "altruism" (in quotation marks) and altruism in the literal sense, "meaning that we feel the need to act kindly toward others simply because this is the right thing to do".[55] 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, our responses to the evolved bodily messages are not hardwired. Rather, the way our brains are trained by the environment, especially by our social community, is the definitive factor in how we response.[56]

What is required from an agent to hold her responsible for her actions? The concept of freedom is crucial in understanding autonomy and responsibility. If moral agency is seriously seen as relational, meaning that human agents are not isolated owners of the moral expertise and some non-natural free will, then we need to risk absolute freedom of agency, and admit that it can be compromised with the social and material determinants. In evolutionary explanations of morality and motivation these determinants are emotions – and what evolutionary scientists call moral emotions – that are, first of all, thought to limit the freedom of moral agency in a way that endangers the objectivity of morality and reduces it to natural selection. A few words need to be mentioned about how emotions can help us to understand the contextual and relational nature of freedom.

Robert Solomon, specialized in the philosophy of emotions, argues for *embodied conception of freedom*. Contrary to the Kantian approach, where "free choice entails a form of metaphysical 'subject' or 'agent' by way of the 'Will'" which is "supposed to be some distinctive 'faculty' of the mind", he argues that freedom and responsibility are connected with "the rest of a person's character, circumstances, and culture, including his or her reflections on these." Freedom should be evaluated in relation to the narrative of one's life.[57] Solomon expands the concept of agency to cover far more aspects of humanity than the limited realms of the will and the reason.[58] He thinks of emotions as judgements, or acts, for

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[53] Ruse (1998), 214, 258. Interestingly, this is comparable with the Christian view, according to which human nature is not only free, but also fallen, corrupted by original sin. Humans are compelled to morality, but we fail in choosing what is right.

[54] Moral agency delineates three levels of desire: basic desires, reflectively chosen second-order desires, and third-order desires, by which we can prioritize our already reflected on volitions that are competing with each other. Like an advanced version of a chess-playing machine, choices on the third level use more general principles instead of calculating all the options. Ruse (2001), 212-215.

[55] Ruse's meta-narrative is, however, that of efficient evolution: morality, namely altruism in the literary sense, is the best pragmatic strategy to attain biologically profitable "altruism". This means that in order to most efficiently serve our "selfish genes" we should not be selfish. "[W]e need real altruism to make us break through our usual selfishness." Ruse (2001), 191-192, 195.

[56] Clayton, 319, 325.

[57] "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, 206.

[58] Solomon, 204-206. Somewhat the same argument that Solomon makes about freedom, and thus, non-reductivity of emotions, Mark Rowlands puts forward about consciousness in his book The nature of consciousness. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001.) Explanatory reduction, Rowlands

which an agent is responsible. Even though emotions are not always deliberately chosen in the Kantian sense of freedom, one remains responsible for them. Analogically, choosing one's values is deeply tied to 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 Solomon, "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, as well as theses about values, tend to be self-conforming.[59] I would add to Solomon's view, that the "evolutionary" process of emotions, moral senses, and values are bound to the social and ecological relationships, which are fundamentally constitutive for what we are and how we feel in various situations. The meaning of emotions and values is constructed in social and material connections with the different others.

Environmentalists concern for the low motivation of people to live in accordance of their environmental values. The values and conducts do not carry out actions. Explanatory theories are of help. In their explanations of the character and behaviour of a moral agent, ecofeminism focuses on place, while evolutionary view focuses on time. An illuminating aspect in evolutionary explanation is that responsibility can be speared in time. Autonomy is not necessarily related to an individual or to a group of current agents, but also to continuous lines of agency.[60] Freedom of will is relative to the decisions and influences of our ancestors. Even though we may be well informed and seemingly free, our autonomy is limited by our past relatives, contemporary mates and the by those who will exist after us (through the capacities of imagination, illumination and hope). The agents of autonomy can exceed the limits of an individual. But rather, relations in time and space form a line of agency. The Christian concept of "original sin" seems to parallel the idea that responsibility is not always reducible to any individual or any one instant of decision-making. Evolutionary biology and Christian ethics could agree that we are responsible not just for our own acts, rather for certain wider traits of behaviour, such as cultural values, and even for some physical adaptations.[61]

Relational agency and environmental ethics

Both social constructionism and evolutionary ethics, in their hardwired forms, include a problematic aspect of reductionism.[62] Neither the blank-paper theory nor naturalist ("full paper") theory of human nature can plausibly explain the nature of moral agency and

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argues, can reach the phenomenal aspects of consciousness that belong to its *object,* but not those 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, 219.

[59] Solomon, 232. See also page 210 and his earlier books.

[60] There is an interesting ongoing philosophical discussion about the notions of collective autonomy and responsibility. See David Copp, "The Collective Moral Autonomy Thesis", Journal of Social Philosophy 38, 2007, 369-388.

[61] According to evolutionary biologists, human physical evolution over the last centuries has been more rapid than ever, due to swiftly changing environments and lifestyles. Thus, we are, to some extent, also responsible for our biological evolution.

[62] Constructionism is also criticized about dichotomizing humans and nature in a way that sustains the problematic modernist presuppositions of ethics. Human subjects construe the whole reality which then becomes "culturalized." This is seen to undermine possibilities of moral realism. See e. g. Patric Curry, "Re-thinking nature: Towards an ec-pluralism", Environmental Values 12, 2003, 337-360.

responsibility without reduction. They suffer from the scientific ideal of simplicity.[63] But in their chastened forms, together, they could offer environmental ethics some insight it badly needs. The most plausible conception of human nature, from the point of view of conditions of moral agency, would overlap the constructionist view without rejecting biological determinants. The criticism that ecofeminists and evolutionary ethicists share against universal and unitary humanness could be helpful if adopted into environmental virtue ethics to overcome the problems of modern virtue ethics.[64] A relational approach defends the plurality of values and resists the concept of value tied with any category of being. In spite of defending realism concerning the "world out there", evolutionary biology stresses that "the world" is not stable. Diversity and plurality – also with regard to what is "of value" – result from and continuously changing by the evolutionary processes in which all particular actors are influential.[65]

A common element in relational views is an attempt to describe the "inner" aspects of moral agency as both *internally interconnected* and *externally dependent*. They do not appreciate universal and absolute accounts of rationality, free will or autonomy. As relational features, on the contrary, rationality and autonomy are tied with the particularities and praxis of the agent in question. Cultivating ones own moral agency and a habit to respect the others do not just make the agent more virtuous, but also advances the moral agency of the whole community.

Relationality of moral agency does not, however, contrast with *moral realism* or *objectivism*. Naomi Scheman, for example, argues against the predominant supposition in modern moral philosophy that emotions are not states of individuals, and that they are not inimical to the achievement of moral objectivity. Emotions in Scheman's view can be seen as relational in both senses stressed in this chapter: They are relational in sense that they are *"discursive"*, constructed in between the different beings and relying on social meanings, but also in sense that in them our *material* relations are interrelated with our *social* and also *normative* relations in a way that they cannot be separated. Natural inclinations, constructedness of emotions, and moral objectivity are combined in relational moral agency. Taking emotionally part in emotions that are complex, constellation-like entities, the coherence of which are "relative to irreducible social, contextual explanatory schemes"[66] "facilitates rather than undermines the possibility of the objectivity of moral judgement."[67] Not just emotion, but also value and epistemology should be revised into relational vocabulary. The relational account of value, according to Adam Moore, also makes the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value (that has been popular among environmental ethicists) unimportant: things are interconnected and bound to their conditions in a way that separating the values derived from within and values derived from something outside becomes irrelevant.[68]

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63 Peterson, 57; Midgley (2004), 29-32; Midgley (1994), e.g pages 58-59.

64 See Holly, 391-392. According to Holly, a major problem for environmental virtue ethics concerns essentialistic and exceptional humanity included in virtue ethics. Also Celia Deane-Drummond points to this problem in her chapter in this volume.

65 Moral and factual realms are connected in a metaphysical way. However, this is not necessarily against Hume's law, rather valuations and moral codes can be seen to supervene the evolutionally/scientifically explainable facts. The valuations not just result from various evolutionary facts, but they are also effective in evolution. In the spiral of process, it is not necessary (or even possible) to totally separate between what "is" and what is "hoped for".

66 Scheman, 222.

67 Scheman, 230.

68 "The set of conditions that must obtain for value to obtain makes all value, in a sense, conditional and relational." Moore, 87.

If action precedes knowing, as it does in a relational view, it is very much up to our actions whether we can reach knowledge, and whether our knowledge can be said to be right. It is an issue of attitude, our relation to the "known" that either opens or closes understanding. If we understand the agent in a relational way, the process of knowing is closely related with the process of perceiving and taking part to the web of relations. One cannot grasp the world from outside of it and without risking oneself. Grasping the world means co-constructing it with the others. Taking the relational view entails a view of knowledge that refers to a real, but not ready-made world. Thus, acting precedes knowing and knowing the world makes it different. As relational beings, whenever we face the others in nature we shape ourselves through the other. Relationships with the different kinds of others are the only *sources of knowledge* for us. Knowledge depends on our *attitudes* toward the different others, and on what we see as reasonable reasons for action. We cannot understand anyone we do not love. By describing the world (as lovely or hateful) we *transform humanity*. But this is not in any sense a private question rather a "discursive" question. Our wishes and beliefs are essentially bound to the wishes and beliefs other people have, and more than that, to our material and living surroundings. Our subjective values, beliefs and hopes have an effect on how we treat the different others, human and nonhuman, individuals, groups and systems. Intentional modification of nature affects the conditions of human nature and human culture, moral culture included.[69] A relational account of moral agency implies the key to ethical life is "the elaboration of covenants and negotiations with the Other."[70]

Reasons to respect the different others are complex and interrelated. In respectful relationship we truly face the other and let the other influence us. Without respecting our own relationality and facing of the others, we *degenerate* our possibilities to understand what is good. Anthony Weston, for example, argues that environmental ethics has suffered from the ideal of monistic "concentrism". Against that we should respect the authentic differences and diverse centres of moral worth as "a new paradigm […] in environmental philosophy." Multicentrism, as he calls this paradigm stresses our awareness of ourselves not in the centre of all that is for value (as an agent), but rather among the plurality of values. However, as a relational agents we can never be sure about the multiple centres of the plural values, but, for our moral agency, it is necessary to be aware of them. Awareness of values cannot be justified scientifically or value theoretically. By disentangling moral worth from any one qualification, multicentrism implies a view of ethics that is "no longer constituted by a merely abstract respect, but demands something far more embodied: 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."[71]

Awareness of one's own relationality is something we should seek for – if morality is worth being promoted. We are responsible for remaining the kind of humans that morality will remain in the future as well.[72] Being in mutually vivid relation with the different others is the precondition for a moral future. Moral agency as a capacity does not make us masters. On the contrary, being human in the world is a task.

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[69] According to Celia Deane-Drummond in this volume, together with all kinds of beings we "participate in the drama", and share a "sense of wonder". Enlightened by an evolutionally and ecologically relational nature of all beings, especially of human moral agent, Deane-Drummond's idea of the virtues of participating in the drama of justice and care, I think, would be even stronger.

[70] Shepard, P. (1982), *Nature and Madness*, San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 38, quoted in: Weston, 32.

[71] Weston, 31. See also Narayan and Harding.

[72] Kagan.

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