

Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism and the analogy between moral judgments and the evaluation of other living beings¹

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Abstract: The analogy between moral judgments and the evaluation of animals and plants is a pivotal feature of Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism by means of which this metaethical position attempts to explain the naturalness of morality. However, the usual objection argues that the schema of natural normativity embraced by the main representatives of this view commits itself to biological naturalism (a thesis that programmatically Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism rejects). This essay considers the contribution that John Hacker-Wright and Michael Thompson give in answering this challenge. They suggest a non empirical conception of the schema of natural normativity somehow different to the one endorsed by Rosalind Hursthouse. As a result, I will try to show that according to their notion of natural normativity, Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism can maintain the thesis that moral judgments are analogous to the evaluation of animals and plants while avoiding the commitment to biological naturalism.

Keywords: natural normativity; human nature; transcendental anthropology; Hacker-Wright; Thompson; Foot.

1. Introduction

According to Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism morality is somehow related to human nature. This thesis is usually explained by means of the analogy between moral judgments and evaluative judgments of non-human organisms. Philippa Foot, one of the main representatives of this view, points out that the former are just a kind of evaluation that we already find within the realm of animals and plants. As she says: “I am quite seriously likening the basis of moral evaluation to that of the evaluation of behaviour in animals” (Foot 2001: 12). Hence, a judgment such as “A murderer is a bad human being” is analogous to “A free riding wolf is a defective wolf”. In short, Foot, who employs the

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schema of natural normativity described by Michael Thompson (Thompson 2008), argues that the distinctiveness of this kind of evaluation consists in employing the life-form of the living being in question as the criterion to evaluate it. As a result, a wolf that eats but does not take part in the hunt is defective because its life-form entails the natural-historical statement: “Wolves hunt in packs to survive”. Similarly, a human being who lacks the virtue of courage is a bad human being because human nature entails the natural-historical statement: “Human beings need the virtue of courage to survive”.

Nonetheless, the application of this framework to human beings is the target of some criticism. The worry usually raised is: “How is it possible to derive moral judgments from statements about human nature?”. Indeed, it seems that when we consider natural-historical statements about human beings “it’s hard to see how we are here concerned with *evaluation* except in a highly deflationary sense that has little bearing on ethics, as opposed simply to a kind of *classification*” (Lenman 2014). Julia Annas has formulated a similar objection in *Virtue Ethics: What Kind of Naturalism?* (Annas 2005). Her charge is worth consideration for two main reasons: on the one hand, she agrees with Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse in considering morality not a mysterious property that emerges with human beings, but rather as a property having counterparts in the realm of other living beings. On the other, she claims that the “schema of natural normativity” has different relevance when applied to human beings to the one endorsed by Neo-Aristotelian-Naturalism. Although Annas concedes that looking at the nature of animals and plants is a good strategy to evaluate them, she denies that this is also an adequate one for human beings. Whereas the former are biologically determined, the latter not. Hence, despite human beings exhibiting a similar biological structure to social animals, human biology takes into account facts that have little to say in ethics. In particular, biological facts yet ask for an ethical evaluation and, therefore, they do not yield any firm foundation for morality. As a consequence, Annas sets out an alternative account of the relevance of human nature for ethics. Briefly, she claims that the most successful view, still able to consider human nature somehow relevant for morality, is the one that takes into account biological facts about human nature as part of what is “inescapable about us”. They are the “material” that human rationality has to deal with in order to live a happy, i.e. eudaimonistic, life (Annas 2011: 93). As a result, whatever conception of human nature Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism provides, its role in ethics has to be considerably reduced. Annas’ objection, therefore, stems from the assumption that Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism is a form of biological naturalism. Indeed, although advocates of this view usually reply that this assumption is wrong it is not fully clear how they can consistently dismiss this assumption and the related objection (Lutz *et*

al. 2018). As a result, John Hacker-Wright has pointed out that Philippa Foot's Naturalism, and the overall Neo-Aristotelian view, "is in the midst of a cool reception in ethics" (Hacker-Wright 2009b: 1).

In this essay, I will try to highlight that a crucial element of Neo-Aristotelian argument concerns the conception of the schema of natural normativity found in the realm of animals and plants. Especially, the main point of Annas' argument underlines that Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism has a hard time claiming that moral judgments are analogous to the evaluation of animals and plants and while denying that they entail a biological conception of human nature. However, amongst advocates of Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism there are two competing views of the schema of natural normativity. The first one is suggested by Hursthouse, whose account of morality is the main target of Annas' objection. In the first section of this paper I will deal with Hursthouse's understanding of the analogy and I will try to show that it is not fully clear how she can account for a non scientific appeal to human nature given her general conception of natural normativity. In the last section, I will consider a different line of reasoning put forward by John Hacker-Wright and Michael Thompson which suggests a different reading of the framework of natural normativity. My goal, here, is to try show that provided their conception of the schema of natural normativity it is possible to maintain the analogy between moral judgments and normative judgments while avoiding Annas' charge.

2. *The charge against Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism*

2.1. Biological naturalism

The appeal to human nature is one of the main concerns amongst the critics of Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism². The usual worry is that it is hard "to provide a neutral conception of human nature that gives us the list of traits which ground our conception of the good" (Donatelli *et al.* 2003: 183). "Nature is not normative, description is not justification" since justification "either in the theoretical reasoning or in the practical one depends on the rationality of reasoning, not on natural features of the subject" (Mordacci 2007: 199). John McDowell also writes that "even if we grant that human beings have a naturally based need for the virtues, in a sense parallel to the sense in which wolves have a naturally based need for co-operativeness in their hunting, that need does not cut any ice with someone who questions whether virtuous behaviour

² For a detailed discussion of it: cf. Samek Lodovici 2009: 86-100.

is genuinely required by reason” (McDowell 1995: 133). Following this line of criticism, Annas has pointed out that Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism has a hard time accounting for the justification³ of moral judgments.

The overall schema of natural normativity aims to explain how the evaluation of living beings are related to the life-forms they belong to. This framework consists of the intersection of two kinds of propositions. Firstly, the schema of natural normativity pinpoints the life-form of a certain kind of living being: roughly, it consists of “natural-historical” statements about the general ends living beings of a certain kind pursue and about how those ends are achieved. Secondly, the schema provides the patterns of normativity in order to evaluate an individual of a certain kind as good or defective. This schema has been further developed by Hursthouse who outlines a detailed account of the relationship between the ends pursued by plants, animals and human beings and their characteristic ways of achieving them. In particular, her view ends up considering human beings as a kind of social animals that “have a particular biological make-up and a natural life cycle” (Hursthouse 1999: 158). Therefore, a good human being is determined by how its “(i) parts (ii) operations (iii) actions and (iv) desires and emotions” well serve its characteristic four ends, namely “(i) individual survival, (ii) the continuance of the species, (iii) characteristic pleasure or enjoyment/characteristic freedom from pain, and [...] (iv) the good functioning of the social group” (Hursthouse 1999: 154). However, rationality marks a significant disanalogy between social animals and human beings. Whereas “the other animals live ‘the way’ they do because it is in their nature to do so; we do not. Other animals cannot contemplate alternatives and decide to change things, or choose to try a new way as we can; they are biologically determined, we are not” (Hursthouse 1999: 169).

Nonetheless, “the relationship between the four ends which we have because we are social animals, and our human rationality” (Annas 2005: 17) is the target of Annas’ objection. She argues that Foot and Hursthouse endorse what she calls the “weaker relation” between the four ends and rationality, namely “the structure – the appeal to just those four ends – really does constrain, substantially, what I can reasonably maintain is a virtue in human beings” (Hursthouse 1999: 172). In other words, the power of rationality to change our biological make-up is weak insofar its role is to determine the characteristic

³ I take the problem of “justifying considerations” as it is presented by Cristian Miller: “When we say that a state of affairs is good or an action forbidden, we do not mean that they have these normative statuses for no reason whatsoever. Rather, states of affairs are good and actions forbidden in virtue of one or more considerations that makes it the case that they are this way. [...] But it is not the case that slavery is wrong for no reason at all – its wrongness, we might say, has an underlying nature, some underlying feature or set of features that makes it the case that it is wrong” (Miller 2011: xxi).

way of achieving the four ends and not to decide whether those ends should be pursued. By contrast, Annas, who endorses the “stronger relation”, argues that the characteristic four ends could only set weak constraints on rationality, namely they are only part of “the material that rationality has to work on” (Annas 2005: 27). Although she concedes that human beings have a similar structure to social animals and they are part of the same natural world, she contends that, in ethics, human beings only in virtue of their rational nature “can recognize a bad idea when they see one” (Annas 2005: 25). Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism, therefore, concedes too much to human biology whereas it is not “particularly helpful from the point of view of ethics to stress the continuities between the evaluative patterns in the lives of plants and animals and those in ours—other than the fact we are part of nature” (Annas 2005: 28). Annas, especially, develops this argument in *Virtue Ethics: What Kind of Naturalism?*:

One [worry] is that on some points it looks as though we do have *prima facie* reason to worry whether the weaker relation will produce conclusions that are ethically strong enough. [...] As I indicated, I’m in no doubt of the right conclusion; I’m here raising concern as to whether the weaker Aristotelian view of the relationship between our rationality and our human nature as social animals of a certain kind is really strong enough for us to feel that it fully entitles us to it. (Annas 2005: 19)

Annas’ main point is that a very general notion of human nature, consisting of biological facts, cannot provide a firm ground for moral judgments.⁴ She objects that Foot and Hursthouse have not recognized that if the schema of natural normativity is consistently applied to human beings it cannot avoid grounding ethical conclusion that even they would reject, such as “Woman’s life should be narrowed by reproduction”. Indeed, the application of the patterns of natural normativity comes to this conclusion as follows:

- a) Reproduction is part of the life cycle of human beings;
- b) Reproduction weighs more heavily on women than on men;
- c) Women’s lives should be narrowed and constrained because of reproduction;
- d) A woman who does not narrow and constrain her life because of reproduction is defective.

The problem, here, is that the notion of human nature we can acquire still asks for a moral evaluation. Ancient ethical theories, says Annas, appeal to human nature, but its role in ethics is not very relevant (Annas 1993: 218). As

⁴ “What kind of justification can it [human nature] then provide? None, on certain views of justification. If to justify a theory we have to reduce it to some other kind, or define its terms of some other theory which is independent of it and in some requisite way better grounded, then ancient theories provide no justification through nature” (Annas 1993: 218).

Annas puts it

we all need food, shelter, community and so on. But these are just the kinds of facts which for the ancient theories establish nature in the sense of what is inescapable about us [...] As soon as we proceed further, and try to show that more specific human needs are natural, we run into the problem that what one theory asserts another denies, and that the very terms of the debate are disputed... it is hard to see how in fact the theories can use nature neutrally to criticize one another. (Annas 1993: 2018)

Biological facts, hence, cannot reveal the moral good. For instance, once we know the biological differences between man and women, it is a matter of rational considerations how we evaluate them. As Maria Silvia Vaccarezza writes:

this relationship [the weaker relationship between biological ends and rationality], says Annas, presents more than one problem; not all ends and biological factors have the same consideration as regards the good life, since it is recommended that some of them be promoted, while others are (rightly) contrasted (e.g. establishing what is the good life for men and women, we typically do not believe that women should be limited to reproduction). (Vaccarezza 2017: 16)

2.2. From animals to human beings

Let us now consider Annas' assumption that the Neo-Aristotelian view is a form of biological naturalism. It is generally assumed that the structure of the Neo-Aristotelian argument, as Christopher Gowans puts it, "divides into three phases: a set of claims about the evaluation of living beings, especially animals; application of this framework to the evaluation of human beings; and discussion of the difference human rationality makes to this application" (Gowans 2011: 30). The first phase explains how normativity is found within the realm of animals and plants. Since the world of living beings consists of natural facts, namely facts countenanced by contemporary sciences, Annas infers that this kind of evaluation is related to biological statements. Hursthouse confirms this reading by claiming that:

the evaluation of living beings are, in the most straightforward sense of the term, "objective"; indeed, given that botany, zoology, ethology, etc. are sciences, they are scientific. [...] Second, notwithstanding their objectivity, indeed their scientific status, such evaluations are true only: "for the most part" and, moreover, riddled with imprecision and indeterminacy. (Hursthouse 1999: 155)

As a result, Annas seems warranted in assuming that the Neo-Aristotelian schema of natural normativity evaluates a free-riding wolf as defective by looking at scientific statements of the wolf's nature.

If we now turn to the second phase of the argument, Annas assumes that the natural normativity framework may also apply to human beings in virtue of the biological similarities between human beings and the other living beings. Human beings “are a part, though a distinctive part, of the world that the sciences tell us about” (Annas 2005: 11). The same distinction between the four biological ends and rationality draws a clear dividing line between what human beings have *qua* social animals and what is distinctive of their nature, i.e. rationality. As a result, Annas says that Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism “helps us to make sense of ethics in a way that takes account of all of our nature – our biological nature which makes us part of the world of living things as well as our rational nature which makes us enquire and reflect about it” (Annas 2005: 13). Again, Hursthouse confirms this point by arguing that:

ethical naturalism is usually thought of as not only basing ethics in some way on considerations of human nature, but also as taking human beings to be part of the natural, biological order of living things. Its standard first premise is that what human beings *are* is a species of rational, social animals and thereby a species of living things – which, unlike “persons” or “rational beings”, have a particular biological make-up and a natural life cycle. (Hursthouse 1999: 158)

At this stage of the discussion it is worth noting that Annas agrees with the general structure of Hursthouse’s argument so far presented. As she says, one of the great merits of “this kind of biological naturalism is that we find that the normativity of our ethical discourse is not something which emerges mysteriously with humans and can only be projected back, in an anthropomorphic way, onto trees and their roots. Rather, we find normativity in the realm of living things, plants and animals, already” (Annas 2005: 13). However, in her main work *On Virtue Ethics*, Hursthouse denies embracing a strategy in ethics which is committed to a top-down derivation of morality from a scientific conception of human nature. Indeed, she dismisses the idea that the validation of moral judgments entails an ethically neutral point of view in order to evaluate what is a characteristic trait of human nature. Her point is that the conception of human nature embraced by Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism is already within an ethical framework, i.e. the Aristotelian one. As she puts it: “the validation of our conceptual scheme is Neurathian. We proceed from within it, scrutinizing it, validating or changing it, bit by bit, plank by plank. [...] The conceptual scheme we proceed from within in the naturalism project is a conceptual scheme that embraces our ethical outlook” (Hursthouse 2004: 266). As a result, I believe that the debate so far discussed ends up questioning why Annas and the majority of the critics of Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism consider this view as a version of biological naturalism. My point here is to underline that Annas’

argument shows that the analogy between morality and natural normativity, as it has been mainly conceived of by Hursthouse, is deeply problematic.⁵ In particular, Annas suggests that if Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism is not a form of biological naturalism the analogy between moral judgments and the evaluation of other living beings turns to be useless in ethics. As mentioned above, Annas and Hursthouse agree that i) normativity is not an exclusive property of humans and that ii) human beings are part of the same biological order of animals and plants. Furthermore, they also agree on considering iii) natural-historical judgments about animals and plants as related to scientific facts about their nature. Nonetheless, Annas comes to the conclusion that Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism, at least Hursthouse's version, cannot avoid being a form of biological naturalism since, as Hursthouse says, "the appeal to the biological four ends really does constrain, substantially, what is a virtue in human beings" (Hursthouse 1999: 158). In other words, if i) the evaluation of animals and plants is related to natural, i.e. biological, facts and if ii) Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism purports to liken moral judgments to the evaluation of other living beings in virtue of the biological similarities between human beings and social animals, Annas suggests that iii) the analogy holds only if Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism is a form of biological naturalism. By contrast, if Hursthouse rejects this conclusion, as she does, Annas' argument objects that biological similarities between humans and social animals should play a different role in ethics.

In other words, Hursthouse has to abandon the idea that the four ends human beings have *qua* social animals put strong constraints on rationality. Indeed, if Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism refuses to reduce ethics to biology, it therefore embraces a conception of morality significantly different from the kind of normativity found in the realm of other living beings. As regards moral judgments, biology could not yield the same kind of foundation that provides for the evaluation of animals and plants. Hence, Annas argues that the best alternative view to Hursthouse's one, able to combine the merits of Neo-Aristotelian account of morality without being committed to biological naturalism, is to reassess the role of human nature in ethics. Whereas the evaluation of animals and plants depends on biological statements because they are biologically determined, in ethics, the findings of biology can only matter as the material that rationality has to deal with. This is the role, however little, that human nature can fulfil in ethics.

⁵ Hacker-Wright, however, argues that Hursthouse's view of the four ends is not related to the human biological make-up. He suggests a different understanding according to which the status of the four ends are derived from our rational self-interpretation. See Hacker-Wright, 2013: 91. A detailed discussion of this debate is in De Anna, 2018a: 320. However, my point here is to underline that Hursthouse's view could give support to Annas' interpretation given her conception of the schema of natural normativity.

3. *Normativity and the life-form of living beings*

As we have seen in the former section, Annas' argument shows that the analogy with living beings is problematic, within the Neo-Aristotelian perspective. In particular, Hursthouse's version of Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism finds itself in a dilemma: either it embraces the scientific naturalistic thesis in order to claim that moral judgments are analogous to the evaluation of other living beings or it has to abandon the idea that the analogy has any relevance in ethics in order to avoid the appeal to a scientific conception of human nature. In this section, I will consider a line of reasoning within the Neo-Aristotelian view that suggests an alternative conception of the analogy to that of Hursthouse. The further perspective seems to embrace a non-biological appeal to human nature.

3.1. The transcendental appeal to human nature

According to Thompson, the schema of natural normativity entails a kind of evaluation of living beings that appeals to their life-form: "the representation of an individual living organism as living is everywhere mediated by an implicit representation of the species or life form under which the individual is thought to fall" (Thompson 2008: 67). The life-form of a horse, for instance, consists of natural-historical statements such as "A properly constituted horse is four legged". Then, the evaluation of a horse against its life-form deems the horse in question either good or defective whether it is four-legged or not. However, as we said above, Annas understands the schema of natural normativity as related to scientific facts about the nature of animals and plants. Then, it turns out that Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism explains why horses should be four-legged by looking at statistical normalities about their behaviour. However, Thompson dismisses this understanding by pointing out that natural historical statements are not a mere survey of individuals. They are "neither abstractions of individual cases such as 'Every horse does/has X', nor statistical normalities such as 'Horses are four legged for the most part'" (Thompson 2008: 68). A natural-historical judgment, he says, "may be true though individuals falling under both the subject and predicate concepts are as rare as one likes, statistically speaking" (Thompson 2008: 68) and, therefore, it rather expresses an irreducible form of thought that exhibits a distinctive nexus between a life-form noun and a predicate. Thompson's basic idea is that whenever we describe a certain phenomenon, such as "reproduction" or "self-maintenance", the understanding of that phenomenon requires the appeal to a wider context, namely the life-form of the individual living being in question. As he says, "the same phenomenon of 'cell division' amounts to reproduction for bacteria whereas

it amounts to self-maintenance for California condors” (Donatelli *et al.* 2003: 192). Hence, the life-form of a living being works as the criterion whereby we identify a behaviour or an action in the same way the set of rules that defines a sport establishes what is a part of the game. Thompson’s logical argument, therefore, highlights the idea that whenever we consider animal behaviour or human action we already take into account some prior patterns of normativity entailed by the life-form of the living being in question. Hacker-Wright also points out that the evaluation of living beings entails what he calls the “background understanding of their form of life” (Hacker-Wright 2009a: 5). In particular, he argues that in order to identify an organism we must assume a normative perspective. As I will try to explain more in detail in the next section, Hacker-Wright suggests that the concept of “function” employed by Foot already requires a context, i.e. the life-form, where some features could be described as appropriate to pursue the vital operations and processes of a certain living being. The schema of natural normativity, therefore, is not a matter of statistical normalities; rather, it starts from the logical question about the identification of something as an organism. Furthermore, Hacker-Wright focuses on human action and its relation to the human life-form. He, especially, considers GEM Anscombe’s conception of action and highlights that the understanding of human action requires the appeal to non-observable features of it, namely we cannot identify what we are doing by merely registering it from observation.⁶ As human beings, we have “the non-observational access to our form of life”. Hence, describing ourselves as engaging in some action involves a transcendental appeal to our life-form. A human being “through one’s own vital operations, has a non-observational insight into one’s form of life. This second point underlines that our relation to our own form of life, unlike our relation to any other form of life, is transcendental in that it does not consist in any observable feature of the world” (Hacker-Wright 2009a: 6). According to Hacker-Wright, therefore, the first personal access to human life-form is the basis of morality. He purports to outline a version of Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism which recognizes “agency” as the main feature of human nature. As he says, human beings are “agents in order to act” (Hacker-Wright 2012: 17). Through our direct access to our actions, we learn that whatever damages our agency is bad. Besides, it is through “basic human experience one learns that one is a member of a kind of being among whom it is normal that one care about some others’ needs and that some others care about one’s own needs.

⁶ When we act, we do not appeal to any observable features of that action in order to understand and express what we are doing. Anscombe, for instance, says that we do not know “we are painting a wall yellow” by looking at the movements of our body (Anscombe 1957: 49).

That does not happen by induction, but rather by situating ourselves against the background of a form of life” (Hacker-Wright 2009b: 320). As a result, the transcendental mediation of the human life-form is the condition of possibility of the identification of human action and by means of the direct access to their vital operations, human beings acquire a kind of knowledge which is partially independent of external observation.

In conclusion, Hacker-Wright outlines a reading of Foot’s ethical naturalism that combines two elements which haven’t been sufficiently considered by her critics. Firstly, Foot embraces Thompson’s logical argument underlying the schema of natural normativity according to which the mediation of a life-form is necessary to identify something as an organism. Secondly, she adopts a transcendental perspective on human nature irreducible to any empirical account of it.

3.2. From human beings to animals

If we now consider some consequences of this line of reasoning, I believe that Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism can consistently reject Annas’ assumption and maintain that moral judgments and the evaluation of other living beings are analogous. The first crucial difference from Hursthouse’s and Annas’ account of the analogy rests on the conception of the schema of natural normativity. As we have seen in the former section, both Hacker-Wright and Thompson dismiss the idea that the life-form of a living being is acquired through the scientific method and, hence, there is no such a scientific connection between life-form statements and the evaluation of an individual living being. As a result, the idea that Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism is a form of biological naturalism is wrong insofar as even the evaluation of animals and plants is not committed to the method of sciences. Indeed, as Hacker-Wright points out, Foot’s ethical naturalism has a different theoretical goal from evolutionary biology. Her main point is that in order to identify an organism we must look at them from a normative standpoint. Hence “the suspicion that Foot is importing a flawed notion of biological function, according to which the features of an organism are as if placed by an intelligent designer in order to promote the organism’s welfare” does not recognize that the notion of “function” is just necessary “to identify something as an organism” (Hacker-Wright 2009b: 312). Then, it follows that the appeal to a certain conception of a life-form is partially independent from the method of biology, since the task of the schema of natural normativity is carried out before any scientific explanation of how certain living beings with certain features might take over. The appeal to a certain life-form is “(logically) *before* developing any empirical theories of the organism [...] On Foot and Thompson’s view, establishing what is normal for that species is an irreducibly interpretive task, and we are always employing

some interpretation when we approach organisms, whether as armchair naturalists or evolutionary biologists” (Hacker-Wright 2009b: 316). In conclusion, both Thompson and Hacker-Wright give support to the idea that Annas is not legitimate in assuming that the application of the schema of natural normativity to human beings introduces the scientific method to acquire a certain conception of human nature since this method is not even employed in the realm of other living beings. Moreover, following this understanding of the schema of natural normativity I think that a further point can be stressed. As we said above, Annas’ objection assumes that Neo-Aristotelian argument follows the three phases described by Gowans. Firstly, the normativity is found into the natural world of animals and plants (first phase), then, this schema is applied to human beings (second phase and third phase). However, Neo-Aristotelian argument does not undertake this order. Indeed, according to Hacker-Wright the mediation of the “life-form” is transcendental, namely it requires the direct access to a certain life-form. Hence, if what is good for a living being is framed by its life-form and this relationship is analogous amongst different kinds of living beings it follows that, as human beings, we only have direct access to the human life-form. Furthermore, if the mediation of the human life-form is firstly grasped by the direct access that every human being has to her/his own vital operations it also derives that we can look at the world of other living beings only in a following phase and in a very inaccurate way. Hacker-Wright and Thompson point out that a certain conception of human nature is “the first life form concept” that we acquire, since it “is already in everything we think of ourselves and one another” (Thompson 2008: 82), and it “is a pure concept of the understanding devoid of even the least empirical accretion” (Hacker-Wright 2009a: 6). As a result, the phases of Neo-Aristotelian argument seems to follow an order in which the first phase is concerned with the explanation of how human life-form could transcendentially frame actions whereas the second one consists in the application of this framework to the realm of animals and plants. This new order seems to ascribe to the latter phase the role of clarifying how the former phase works, namely how human nature frames the functioning of practical rationality. In particular, looking at the behaviour of animals and plants seems to be a powerful strategy since it seems sufficiently easy to describe what is good for them. However, the relationship between the life-form statements about living beings and normative judgments has to be drawn in accordance with the relevant differences of their life-forms and taking into account that we can acquire knowledge about them with a lower degree of accuracy since we have the direct access to only our life-form.

4. *Conclusions*

In conclusion, I think that Hacker-Wright and Thompson purport to set out a view of the relationship between human nature and morality which could consistently be considered as not committed to the method of biology and, at the same time, it can still claim that moral judgments and the evaluation of other living beings are analogous. According to this reasoning, Annas' objection fails insofar as it understands the analogy employed by Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism as grounded on the biological similarities between human beings and the other living beings. However, Annas has the merit to highlight that this analogy is somehow problematic within the Neo-Aristotelian perspective. Her objection suggests that a weakness of Hursthouse's strategy concerns to which extent the evaluations of animals and plants and moral judgments are analogous, provided that the former entail a biological conception of nature whereas the latter an ethical one. In particular, if the analogy rests on the biological similarities between human beings and the other social animals, it seems that Annas provides the most successful view about the relevance of human nature in ethics, which, however, still leaves open the question why human beings should act in normatively constrained ways. By contrast, Thompson and Hacker-Wright claim that natural historical judgments are logically different from statistical normalities even within the realm of animals and plants. In addition, they suggest that Foot's ethical naturalism is committed to a transcendental conception of human nature, which assumes, as starting point, the direct access that every human being has to her/his actions. As a result, I think that it is possible to suggest a different order of the phases of Neo-Aristotelian which is consistent with the understanding of the schema of natural normativity put forward by Thompson and Hacker-Wright and in which the analogy between moral judgements and non human normative judgments does not depend on a biological conception of the life-forms of all living beings since it starts from a previous non-empirical conception of our life-form. Nevertheless, it is possible, briefly, to underline that this line of reasoning still leaves some questions unanswered and it asks for a better characterization of at least two elements of its argument. The first one is an ontological one. If moral judgments are analogous to the evaluation of animals and plants, it seems important to provide a metaphysical account of the similarities between human beings and the other living beings considering that Thompson and Hacker-Wright reject the idea that the natural world of animals and plants consists of scientific facts. The problem, here, is that Thompson pays attention only to the common logical form of moral judgments and the evaluation of other living beings and Hacker-Wright highlights only the transcendental element of Foot's anthropology and,

hence, the question about the grounds on which the analogy relies is wide open. The second one is epistemological. If the evaluation of living beings is partially independent from the scientific method it seems also necessary to investigate to what extent normative judgments, both in the realm of human beings and in the realm of other living beings, are objective.⁷ If Thompson and Hacker-Wright put forward an understanding of the schema of natural normativity which does not rest on a scientific conception of it, then, it follows that Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism could not acquire the kind of objectivity that biology is supposed to yield.

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⁷ De Anna, for example, points out that it is not a "purely objective, third-personal, empirical, value-free study of human nature" (De Anna 2019: 5) that can set criteria for normativity. Rather, "the thesis that there is an order of our volitional and cognitive capacities is supported via a transcendental reflection on the first-personal point of view". It is from our first personal perspective that we "wonder whether the way in which we are responding to the situation is right. That doubt presupposes a comparison with other ways of responding, that is, other possible ways in which one's volitional and cognitive capacities can be structured" (De Anna 2019: 8).

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