Is it 'more normal' to enhance than to restore our nature?

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Abstract
In this paper I give a short overview about the general implications of issues of human nature within the field of human enhancement. The first section of my contribution deals with a certain intertwining of human enhancement and the intrinsic claims of human nature, showing that a non-statistical concept of human nature can play a crucial role in the debate on human enhancement. After that, my aim is to validate that particular enhancements (e.g. neuro-enhancement) fall under the same normative criteria as "normal enhancement", only requiring a special contextual awareness to co-exist with it ethically. Methodically, my intention is to draw on quasi-naturalist approaches, which argue that our nature as humans is not a "mixed bag", but seems to be wholly constituted by its species-related characteristics. As a result, we can state that our evaluations of living beings or life forms, which are also evaluations of our methods of medical treatments and of our ethical attitudes, depend on our picture of human nature.

Keywords: enhancement, human nature, life form, Neo-Aristotelianism, function, natural goodness

Introduction

Before starting my short investigations, I would like to clarify that nowadays every explicit appeal to human nature is under suspicion. For that reason, a serious explanation of human nature can only be motivated or performed by a robust concept of species membership, potentiality, and naturalness while directly avoiding essentialist allusions. Of course, I am well aware of the fact that making any scientific reference to human nature with the help of these categories is still problematic in our time. Above all, when considering the special issue of human enhancement we find a large number of objections, which very often lead to the point that human nature has to be understood as a mere *flatus vocis*.[1] That means that improving human nature is comparable with improving unicorns: Or to put it less metaphorically, we want to improve something that does not exist (cf. Lewens, 2015, p. 39).

Defining human mature by its role in human enhancement

Contrary to these introductory remarks (and for good reason), I am convinced that human nature still remains a substantial ethical concept that does not allow the problem of its justification to be shifted to the concerns of an unsound and self-sufficient theory of the good.[2] But before we are able to clarify the role of human nature for enhancement, we have to give rise to the question what the ethical status of human nature generally could be. Obviously, this status cannot be deduced merely from essentialist deliberations referring to a certain biological substrate that remains identical to itself throughout natural processes. But it also cannot be deduced from reflections assuming that all of the history of man is meant to comprise the endless, uninterrupted transformation of human nature.

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[1] Most of the philosophizing biologists share this view: "What does evolution teach us about human nature? It teaches us that human nature is a superstition" (Ghiselin, 1997, p. 1). From this perspective, human nature is nothing but a placeholder-concept that only offers "plenty of room for improvement" (Buchanan, 2011, p. 26ff.)

[2] Francis Kamm seems to prefer such an account which argues that "the human and the good are distinct conceptual categories" (Kamm, 2009, p. 103). Admittedly, goodness in this sense is exclusively understandable in terms of a "technical goodness" (Georg Henrik von Wright). According to this view, *X is as good as an S*, not *is X good as an S.* The latter expression rather refers to something that we can call "natural goodness" bringing the human and the good together again.

In recent literature, we can find some pertinent determinations of what human nature has to be like.[3] First, there is the nomological or statistical notion of human nature. According to this account, "human nature is a set of properties that humans tend to possess as a result of the evolution of their species" (Machery, 2008, p. 323).[4] Behind every nomological classification of this kind, we can simply recognize the observation that something is part of human nature only when it is shared by most humans. This "inert" view of human nature can be explained as follows: imagine that you are throwing a yellow ball into a large bowl with lots of yellow, red and blue balls. After that, you grab a single yellow ball by taking it out of the bowl. What happened to the composition of the bowl´s content? Nothing, because grabbing and taking out the ball did not change the fact that there are yellow, red and blue balls still in the bowl.

The "inert" or "mixed bag" approach generally denies the "natural priority of the natural over the artificial" (Harris, 2009, p. 133), because it is assumed that the original state of nature is mainly determined by the "poor", "brutish", "nasty", etc. Following this Hobbesian picture of nature, there is no predominant quality of nature constituting positive norms for human life. From that it follows that nothing normatively relevant can be deduced from a fragmentary concept of nature; we can only rely on statistical results about human nature.

The general tendency to take care of the shared properties of a given species often results from the fact that biologists are convinced that no biological species has a proper nature because they identify the fact of having a certain nature with the fact of having a queer essence called "nature".[5] Probably this could be still valid for the case of Michael Sandel who speaks freely about his "given world" argument, although he always argues that we should not think of life as being a gift from God. Indeed, there is in some sense a natural tendency towards respecting the "given" or the "giftedness" of life (cf. Sandel, 2009), but nature itself is not only meant to be something that is given in an essentialist way. In this paper, I want to present a second elaborated model of human nature that combines the idea of individual traits with the intrinsic normativity of species membership. However, I do not agree with thinkers like Devitt who argue that the species themselves have intrinsic essences (Devitt, 2008). My view of species membership, rather, examines substantial concepts of natural kinship, combining a Neo-Aristotelian life-form approach with Kripke's idea according to which species designates *a posteriori* truths and therefore seem to exist necessarily. In my view, it is too easy to think that we only have to build up clusters where genetic and epigenetic factors are put together. We should, to a greater degree, evaluate the specific role human nature could play in the context of enhancement (that is what I call "the human form objection"). There is, of course, no independent concept called "human nature" applicable to every case of enhancement. Because of that, we are better off approaching things the other way round: There are several concepts of enhancement allowing one to reveal what human nature should be.

The statistical notion of human nature and the human form objection

By referring to the already introduced cluster model or trait-view we can see that a statistical notion of human nature pretends to show that human beings evolve normally if they share the

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[3] Following Daniels (2009), human nature, in general, must be a dispositional, selective population concept without being able to specify how to become effective in some way.

[4] There is, indeed, no room for the idea of natural defects, because there is nothing normally wrong in failing to have characteristic properties.

[5] But we can find a good possibility to rewrite such an essence in terms of references remaining the same across worlds in which the relevant natural facts do not differ: cf. Freiman (2014). With the help of this account it is no longer necessary to assume a queer entity that is bearing something unchangeable like the "factor X" of Fukuyama or the idea that nature has to be understood as a static collection of organisms that can be 'preserved' like a can of fruit (cf. Juengst, 2015).

same properties. But what about those specimens who are cultivating their traits but cannot share them with the majority?

At this point, we should try to offer an account of human nature that will run independently of any statistical assumption. There is only one possibility to speak about human nature in a rational manner, if we can substitute the trait-view with a holistic but flexible conception of human nature: "The only biologically respectable notion of human nature that remains is an extremely permissive one that names the reliable dispositions of the human species as a whole" (Lewens, 2015, p. 40).[6] Unlike Lewens this 'human species as a whole' can only be exemplified in terms of the life form, i.e. the reliable or normal form of human nature.[7]

But what is the difference here? The nomological or statistical notion of human nature only refers to certain traits of the species *homo sapiens sapiens* but not to the human life form itself. Hence, Groll and Lott argue that the "human form is a distinct and legitimate sense of human nature" (Groll & Lott, 2015, p. 625). According to Michael Thompson, it belongs to such a form S "to be/do/have F" (Thompson, 2004, p. 49). From that perspective, an S is "defective/sound in a certain respect if it is/has/does F" (Thompson, 2004, p. 55). As a consequence, human nature is, according to the cluster model or trait-view, no longer qualifiable as the aggregate of accidentally arranged properties. It is rather *the underlying logical concept that allows the evaluation of those traits apparently recognized as being incompatible or insufficient*. This is why the "concept of human form is conceptually prior to the statistical conception of human nature" (Groll & Lott, 2015, p. 630).[8] Human nature expressed in terms of so-called "Aristotelian categoricals" is not meant to describe statistical generalities; it rather "gives the 'how', of what happens in the life-cycle of the species" (Foot, 2001, p. 32). Under these premises, human nature is no longer understandable as a "mixed bag" (Groll & Lott, 2015, p. 624), because from this reduced perspective or "inert view", it is impossible to say that some parts of our nature are good (for us) and other parts are bad (for us).

If we now accept the view of life form instead of promoting the "inert view", we are no longer forced to endorse the division of an originally homogeneous concept of human nature into its heterogeneous capacities.[9] From that it follows, if I intend to manipulate a missing or impaired capacity, for example, one´s capacity to hear, it has, at first glance, no influence on human nature as such, but case-by-case it has an influence on the capacity that is immutably attributed to our nature: It is, for instance, against our nature to permit the 'normalization' of a particular defect.[10]

Against this background, the fact that only some of our human traits are formed to be a part of our nature cannot lead to a normative standpoint. Following on from this, we would be

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[6] Although Lewens is right in claiming that it is necessary to name all the reliable dispositions of a species, he neglects the relevance of the existence of those "unreliable" natural defects forming an objective account of human nature.

[7] While stage-theory of human nature remains descriptive, our life-form concept becomes genuinely normative in descriptive terms.

[8] This view is not consistent with the view of Buchanan who states that "altering or destroying human nature need not result in the loss of our ability to make judgments about the good, because we possess a conception of the good by which we can and do evaluate human nature" (Buchanan, 2009, p. 141). To make judgments about our nature is not independent of our nature; it is itself a part of our nature. Foot (2001) has shown that humans, animals and plants are subjects of the same logical and evaluative structure.

[9] Of course, we have to differentiate dispositions from capacities. According to our human form approach, capacities are direct derivations of dispositions, but they need to be activated like virtues.

[10] If deaf parents insist on the artificially induced trans-generational passing on (e.g., via IVF) of "their" missing capacities to their own children that would be against our nature. With regard to the "inert" -view of human nature, we are only able to evaluate the trait of hearing separate from other traits. For that reason, it would be, compared to the life form-approach, impossible for us to understand why the transfer of defects is morally wrong.

incapable of evaluating whether medical intervention is prohibited or not. But with regard to the concept of life-form or human form presented by Philippa Foot and Michael Thompson, it can be shown that their reflections on the form of human life are contributing to a better understanding of what is good and what is bad for us as human beings. From that point, my aim is to show that human nature obviously has a certain role to play in debates about enhancement. Under these revised epistemological circumstances, human beings that are part of the same human form of life are commonly embedded in the same normative horizon. In this context, ethical assessment of a human being is no longer based on the isolated ability to develop his or her personal autonomy or to ensure his or her cognitive functions; rather, it is necessary to practise and realize the natural dispositions that must be present in order to match the species-typical criteria given by the human form itself.[11] In order to realize this ambitious programme, we only have to put the whole focus on the Neo-Aristotelian idea of well-being. Well-being, in this sense, neither means that there are certain needs an individual has to satisfy for the moment, nor that there are unchangeable dispositions that an individual is forced to realize for the maintenance of its species. Well-being cannot therefore be understood as a proper function ("good for")[12] or as an element of a (retrograde) causal history. It is, in fact, fully comprehensible as an ahistorical or neutral function of the species itself ("genuine good"). Such an ahistorical welfare-based account, provided by Philippa Foot and Michael Thompson,[13] finally aims at demonstrating that *all* traits of a species serve the purpose of fulfilling its own genuine form. In this respect, defects are considered to be something 'natural', because they shed light on the objective form that has to be fulfilled. For this reason, we have to accept the defect as such, which means that we are not compelled to promote a particular enhancement.

The emerging case of particular enhancements

Before we take a look at particular enhancements we should try to give a general account of the phenomenon of enhancement. As Thomas Douglas argues "enhancements are typically understood to be interventions that (a) aim at (succeed in) augmenting human capacities or traits, either by amplifying existing capacities/traits, or by adding new ones; and, (b) are not, or not merely, therapeutic." However, if we consider particular clinical or research contexts "enhancements meet the further criterion that they (c) centrally involve the use of biomedical technologies, such as pharmaceuticals or surgical techniques" (Douglas, 2013).

According to this helpful distinction, let me clarify my concerns a little: The concept of human form is not against medical interventions at all, but this fact does not dispense us from giving an appropriate account whether particular enhancements are required or not. The concept of human form can help us to elucidate the general aim of a re-therapeutization of enhancement issues.[14] Several proponents of enhancement techniques, such as John Harris, notoriously claim that it is not preferable to compensate for special defects if there is the chance to enhance human functions leading to full compensation or overcompensation for these deficits. However, Harris and his colleagues always forget that there are some

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[11] It is very important to know what an "Aristotelian necessity" is. Such a special necessity gives us the overriding criteria to know the basic needs of an organism in order to flourish. Nevertheless, these "Aristotelian Necessities" can hardly explain which actions are normatively relevant or not. From that reason, Anscombe (1981) has developed the theory of *stopping modals* helping to learn normative concepts in practical settings.

[12] The following expression by John Harris perfectly fits an instrumental or technical account of goodness: "If it wasn't good for you, it wouldn't be enhancement" (Harris, 2007, p. 9).

[13] This account is critically examined by Fitzpatrick (2000).

[14] Until now, many authors have drawn a thick line between therapy and enhancement. But that does not imply a general rejection of enhancement. In this paper, I only want to support a 'normalized' account of enhancement: "normal enhancement", in this respect, is nothing more that the idea of lending nature a helping hand or of making small steps forward instead of heating a universal moral progress.

enhancements that are *not necessary* (in a deontic and non-metaphysical sense) at all, because they do not belong to the human form itself. According to Thomas Aquinas, it is always better or good for a blind horse to go slowly. With regard to this trivial example, no one thinks here of enhancement first; however, we should, at least, pay attention to some possible ways for practical accommodation. The word "better" is mostly relative to the subject a proposition is referring to; otherwise it must refer to certain states of affair being independent of any subject that could be described by the expression "better". Hence, if we try to replace the substantive, to which an evaluative predicate is attributed to, by a certain state of affairs (e.g. an emotion or pro-attitude) we undermine a strong notion of "goodness". If we agree with Harris and his weak notion of "goodness" being displaced by a strong concept of "better", we could simply focus on the *state* of the actual blindness of the horse, not on the general aims and needs of a practical life-form called "horse". Following this occurrent-state view, we were forced to bring the fact of curing a dysfunction to the same level as the fact of enhancing a function; but this is – first and foremost in a practical sense – not conducive. According to an ordinary or naturally strong understanding of "goodness", the expression "something is better or something gets better" can only indicate that something is attaining the goal of being good relative to the life form this exemplar is representing. With the help of this explanation we are able to uphold the old therapy/enhancement-distinction and it finally becomes easy to prevent 'a degeneration of the best' (following the old adage *corruptio optimi pessima*).

But another point is also worth mentioning: In order to realize these requirements we have to introduce a normative notion of 'normality' as a new standard that cannot be rejected with the help of our subjective evaluations.[15] So far, "normal" is not an evaluative term but the basis for our evaluations (cf. Fricke, 2015). For this reason, "normal functioning"[16] tends to be a *contradictio in adiecto*, because "to function" signifies nothing more than "to go on in a normal way".[17] Contrary to this, Schwartz (2005) holds that there could be some dysfunctions that are normal. This is obviously not true, because the correct formulation should be that dysfunctions *are not normal, but could be natural*. If we accept the views of Schwartz, Daniels and others we would reduce the occurrence of natural dysfunctions to a matter of our subjective evaluations. However, such natural dysfunctions are not normal. It is, for instance, not appropriate to relativize the normative implications of normality, because without a non-statistical concept of normality we cannot state that one´s life is good with disabilities or tends to be bad if we accept the trans-generational passing on of defects (cf. footnote 10).

Incidentally, this is supposed to be no objection to the everyday practices playing a crucial role in medical reality. The surgeon is, of course, keen to restore the normal functioning of his patient's knee. However, he is only justified in making this assertion because he knows what it means to have an artificial knee joint and to be okay with a healthy knee. Thanks to his ability to discriminate he will, like no other, understand that running faster with the help of an artificial knee joint is often to the disadvantage of other capacities that are not enhanced or dis-enhanced.

As we have already seen, the notion of human nature, as well as a normative concept of normality, can be no product of statistical calculations. Besides, Foot's and Thompson's allusions, from a common sense perspective, do not advocate a certain "folk biology".

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[15] The idea that 'the normal' could be abnormal (for us) is quite sophistic; the idea itself is part of the process of a gradual derealisation of normality, especially of its normativity.
[16] The elaborated "normal functioning"-concept of Norman Daniels cannot give us a theoretical account of the design of a species. Daniels´ interpretation is only interested in the requirements needed for a fair distribution of opportunities; equally, he lacks a robust notion of normality, because it is not clear what is meant by being normal with regard to social embeddedness and moral sensitivity. From that it follows that diseases have nothing else but biological causes.
[17] This is comparable to the following case: We do not need "health" for making it an explicit goal in our life, because we should be happy for the moment not being forced to set up this demand when we are healthy.

Philosophers like Dieter Birnbacher always reject this perspective, because the "natural bonus" induced by our original intuitions must be verified by scientific investigations.[18] However, that is not the crucial point Neo-Aristotelian thinkers aim to show. What they want to show is that an organism is/has/does F as part of its life cycle. With regard to this understanding, human nature is not the direct opposite concept to certain logics of domination (cf. Albers, 2014, p. 248) resulting from a Hobbesian or Rousseauian view of nature. Neo-Aristotelians like Foot, Thompson and Hursthouse rather build on the biological necessities of living beings without reducing their self-formation to the genetic input: "Being a member of a given species is a matter of having the right genetic constitution" (Lewens, 2015, p. 41). This view that is obviously reduced to the right genetic constitution[19] does not comprise the idea of an "Aristotelian necessity"[20], because a necessity, in our understanding, is not only a biological, function-based concept; it is distinctively a matter of practical concerns.[21] Generally that means that we can alter human beings, but not their life form including typical species-related practices. In the case of life forms, we are not adopting the essentialist idea of real-existing natural kinds. We only take note of the basic needs an organism has to fulfil as its intrinsic aims. From that it follows, that the talk of enhancement always corresponds to something *beyond the necessary* whereas life form-conceptions are able to limit themselves to *what is necessary for* an organism *to flourish as* this organism. For the case of particular enhancements, that would normatively imply: "So, to claim that a particular enhancement would eliminate or drastically alter some aspect of human form gives us *pro tanto* reason not to make the change. Likewise, to claim that a particular enhancement would contribute to or genuinely enhance some aspect of human form gives us *pro tanto* reason to make the change" (Groll & Lott, 2015, p. 625).

Conclusion: Application of Results and General Outlook

To shortly summarize, please see the following matrix, which indicates the different modes of enhancement in the light of the classical enhancement/therapy-distinction:

	Neo-Aristotelian Concept of Human Nature/ Life form	The "mixed bag" view of Human Nature
alteration as enhancement	over-restoration as manipulation ("defeating the purpose")	improvement (overloading the purpose)
alteration as therapy	restoration (fitting the purpose)	omission (not exhausting the purpose)
ethical operator	"good as"	"good for"/"better for"
normative evaluation in general and with regard to particular enhancements	moral obligation not to enhance but to give therapy; particular enhancements are restricted to the needs of the	moral obligation to enhance and to upgrade therapy as a mode of enhancement; there are no life-form dependent enhancements,

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[18] Most of the sceptics of the intrinsic value of human nature presuppose that things are more or less natural (Birnbacher, 2006, p. 4ff.; Roughley, 2011, p. 23), but this is not true. We cannot decide which part of the given is natural and which part is artificial. This would reduce our results to mere findings of an unfounded *natura naturata*-perspective.

[19] Apparently, Lewens ignores the important achievements of epigenetic research. Other authors like Okasha (2002) and Ereshefsky (2008) try to bypass these scientific findings by defining species membership in terms of the existence of internal relations between individuals.

[20] We are able to integrate epigenetic as well as genetic factors into our clasping life form-approach.

[21] Cf. footnote no. 11.

	life form	because there is only a universal duty to enhance

As we can see here any normative evaluation rests on the ethical operator we intend to choose. Moreover, whether a given intervention counts as enhancement or not always depends on how it is applied. "How" simply means: to whom and in which amount. Therefore, 'treatment' or 'therapy' is normally *within* the scope of the life a species prescribes to. Otherwise, we are dealing with particular enhancements that do not fit the normal needs of an organism. Hence, our ethical concerns must be *beyond* the scope of life and its normal requirements.

Of course, we can always deflate a strong notion of enhancement insofar as we tend to speak about enhancement as something 'normal'. But 'normal enhancement' is only a non-informative pleonasm that can simply be substituted by notions of 'treatment' or 'therapy'. And if one does not accept this deflationary life form-dependent account of "enhancement" he or she is forced to explain by which means we are able to justify the prioritization of a therapeutic sanction towards a particular enhancement practice. Although Ramsey (2012) rightly believes that human nature can inform us regarding issues of enhancement his account must fail, because he is still committed to the refuted "mixed bag"-view of human nature. His life-history trait cluster model rather wants to avoid essentialism instead of finding a common evaluation pattern as is provided by the Neo-aristotelian life form-approach. As Michael Thompson has shown, every cluster model is combinatory vague and thus remains normatively inert if we do not link our evaluations to the life form we belong to and we are describing – this extends to others as non-humans, not only for us as humans.

Finally, it is very easy to see that my thoughts seem to be in some way anti-meliorist. In my opinion, introducing therapy as the most appropriate mode to modify capabilities and to legitimize these modifications is the only way to answer the claim of Philippa Foot to *leave things as they are*.[22] That does not imply the promotion of omissions to act, because "to leave things as they are" also means to correct the deficiencies that can prevent us from leaving things as they are. Besides, every claim arising from the natural necessity to correct life-form dependent defects is not at risk of being transformed into the universalizable moral obligation to enhance (Harris, 2009). That is why it is obviously 'more normal' to restore than to enhance our nature.

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[22] This moral demand is not only restricted to Western philosophy. Ryuichi Ida, bioethicist from Japan, claims that concerning issues of enhancement we are called upon to respect "the view of 'As it stands'" (quoted from: Savulescu & Bostrom, 2009, p. 5). This view is opening up an important intercultural perspective covering the idea of Wittgenstein shared by most of the Neo-Aristotelians: "I have been asked the very pertinent question as to where all this leaves disputes about substantial moral questions. Do I really believe that I have described a method for settling them all? The proper reply is that in a way nothing is settled, but everything is left as it was" (Foot, 2001, p. 116).

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