

## Good Reasons and Natural Ends:

### Rosalind Hursthouse's Hermeneutical Naturalism

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Rosalind Hursthouse (\*1943) is known chiefly both for her groundbreaking work in applying virtue ethics to practical matters and for her 1999 monograph *On Virtue Ethics*, which represents one of the first and few systematic treatments of modern virtue ethics and, in its central doctrines, remains highly influential to this day.<sup>1</sup> The third and final part of this book is devoted to what is now known as neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism, which in Hursthouse's own words generally consists in "the enterprise of basing ethics in some way on considerations of human nature" (192). On her account, this project specifically aims at rendering the rationality of virtuous action intelligible by situating it in the wider context of human life.

Hursthouse goes about this task by first diagnosing a close connection between virtue and practical reasoning.<sup>2</sup> On her view, virtuous action does not merely consist in performing the right kinds of action but also in acting *on the right reasons*. For each virtue, there is a cluster of reasons characteristic of it. We can, to name just a few examples, distinguish between reasons of justice ('I promised her.', 'It belongs to him. '), reasons of compassion ('He is going through a difficult time.', 'You need this more than I do. '), reasons of gratitude ('Without her, I would not have been able to do it. '), and reasons of temperance ('I still have to drive.', 'We won't have anything for tomorrow otherwise. '). Essentially, possession of a virtue consists in having a stable disposition to respond to such considerations with the appropriate course of action, i.e. to treat them as *good reasons* to act in relevant ways. (121-131) Thus, any attempt at rendering the rationality of virtuous action intelligible must answer the question why it is rational to follow these reasons specifically and not others, or to it put differently, why the virtuous are *objectively* right in treating the reasons of virtue as good reasons.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all references are to Hursthouse (1999). Another comparably systematic development of modern virtue ethics, which appeared around the same time, is Müller (1998). For some of Hursthouse's important contributions to applied ethics, cf. Hursthouse (1987; 1991; 1995; 2000; 2006; 2009; 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this paper, I will use 'practical thought' and 'ethical thought' more or less interchangeably to refer to thought about what ought to be done.

Essentially, Hursthouse believes that acting on these reasons is rational because it is the overall most reliable way for us to attain our flourishing or *eudaimonia*, even if it does not perfectly guarantee it. (167-177) On her view, this connection between virtue and flourishing is established by certain beliefs and convictions about how human life generally works and what matters in it, which entail an understanding of what counts as a good reason for what. Thus, she maintains that the reasons of honesty, for instance, are good reasons because, among other things, lies destroy trust and without trust there can be no genuine friendship; because lying ultimately does not pay since others will eventually find out; because if you stick to the truth in the first place you will not have to monitor your own words all the time; and because the love of truth is a crucial precondition for science, which is an important good in human life. (168)

Hursthouse is conscious of the fact, however, that not everybody shares these convictions. An immoralist wishing to deny the rationality of honesty might, for instance, argue that, with a bit of talent and practice, it is not all too difficult to lie convincingly; that you can fool most people most of the time because they tend to be overly trustful; or that true friendship is a myth because most people only seek their own good in the end, and hence one ought to protect oneself with the occasional lie and should not be too forthcoming. (179, 188) That such differences in outlook are possible indicates that our beliefs about human life are fundamentally *open to doubt* and could, at least in theory, turn out entirely wrong, just as some firmly held convictions of our forebears have turned out, in retrospect, as racist, sexist, classist, and the like.

For this reason, Hursthouse assigns ethical naturalism the task of providing us with a framework for evaluating and, if possible, *validating our beliefs about human life*, which underwrite the goodness of our reasons. Yet, to get the character of her naturalism into view properly, it is important to note what, for Hursthouse, recourse to human nature does *not* consist in. For talk of human nature easily lends itself to the assumption that she must be pursuing a *reductionist* project, which re-conceives ethics in terms of an applied evolutionary or sociobiology in order to provide it with a natural scientific foundation.<sup>3</sup> Hursthouse herself, however, explicitly *rejects* any scientific naturalism of this kind. She maintains that a purely ethological or sociobiological account of human beings would not be rich enough in content

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<sup>3</sup> This misunderstanding underlies a widespread line of criticism against neo-Aristotelian naturalism, which seeks to demonstrate that the traditional virtues are incompatible with, and therefore cannot be grounded in, a purely evolutionary or biological account of human beings. Cf. Andreou (2006), Millum (2006), and Millgram (2009). As will become apparent by the end of this paper, a similar misunderstanding also underlies Leist's (2010, 136-141) charge that Hursthouse's 'biological' naturalism fails due to its alleged reliance on an outdated *vitalistic folk biology* that has been refuted by post-Darwinian scientific biology.

to ground all the complexities of ethical life, as we encounter them in actually leading such a life, i.e. from a practical and first-person point of view. Since natural scientific accounts of the human take an external or third-person perspective on human life, they are ethically underdetermined, and this underdetermination puts a scientific moral philosophy at risk of deriving ethical principles in an overly simplistic manner. On Hursthouse's view, such derivations ultimately act as a *reductio ad absurdum* of this approach, since they easily result in revisions to our ordinary ethical beliefs that are unacceptable on grounds of contradicting basic certainties of human life. (192f.; Hursthouse 2004, 264-266)

Clearly then, it is not Hursthouse's intent to *deduce* the virtues from a substantive account of human nature as it presents itself from the ethically neutral vantage point of natural science; an account specifiable independently of our extant ethical beliefs. Instead, she explicitly agrees with John McDowell that any validation of the virtues can take place only from *within* the ethical outlook we have acquired in our upbringing, i.e. only in recourse to other ethical beliefs we have already come to accept. (165; Hursthouse 2012, 173-175) According to McDowell (1995), recourse to empirical findings about human life cannot supply such a validation because human beings are *practically rational animals*, and as such we can always decide to change the way we go about our lives. Correspondingly, Hursthouse emphasizes that our beliefs about how human life generally works do not capture empirical facts that could be discovered through natural scientific methods such as "observation or statistical analysis" (189). Rather, these beliefs capture a distinct kind of fact. Although Hursthouse has no specific name for them, we might label facts of this kind '*ethical or practical facts*'.

What defines such facts is that *we originally generate them in action*, and hence they are neither fixed nor known in the way of empirical facts. We can always decide to do things differently and, on the basis of reasons, change our ways of acting—and this is why nothing we can determine empirically or statistically about how humans in fact live has final authority in settling the correct account of human nature. Human beings are capable of determining their own way of life and consequently, to some extent, their own nature, i.e. our chosen way of doing things expresses our *free and practical self-interpretation* as human beings. Our beliefs about how human life generally works, which encompass our understanding of what is a good reason for what, have this self-interpretation as their object. On Hursthouse's view, these beliefs form an essential but often overlooked part of our ethical outlook, which therefore does not merely include purely evaluative beliefs but also "ethical but non-evaluative beliefs about human nature and how human life goes" (189). Hursthouse thus

employs a concept of human nature that is not empirical but from the outset essentially normative.<sup>4</sup>

The content of this concept of human nature is determined by our practical self-interpretation and thus ultimately consists in our *acquired ethical outlook*. This is the reason why Hursthouse's intended validation of our beliefs in recourse to human nature can only take place from within this outlook, i.e. only in recourse to other such beliefs. Essentially, Hursthouse aims at evaluating our self-interpretation, which is constituted by our recognition of certain considerations as good reasons for action, in recourse to other reasons and considerations, which equally form part of this self-interpretation. Hence, her ethical naturalism, far from being reductive or scientific, in fact represents a *hermeneutical naturalism*.<sup>5</sup> (178-191; Hursthouse 2004, 273-275)

This raises the question whether such a way of proceeding is not *viciously circular*, since it ultimately aims at validating our acquired ethical outlook in recourse to itself. Given that this outlook is shaped by a particular, culturally and historically contingent tradition of self-interpretation, which we are inducted into in our upbringing, one might even wonder whether such a method of validation would not merely re-articulate our culture-specific prejudices, i.e. fail to make sufficient space for the possibility that our outlook might be wrong. Hursthouse confronts this worry by adopting Otto Neurath's image of the ship the planks of which are exchanged gradually while at sea. In the same way, she argues, we can also evaluate any of our extant beliefs in terms of their coherence with the other parts of our outlook and, if necessary, replace them by and by. A *Neurathian method of self-criticism* thus allows us to make gradual changes to our outlook based on the reasons we have, and in a way that could potentially sum up to a complete change in outlook over time. Hence, on Hursthouse's view, genuine critique does *not* require a foundation for our beliefs that would ground them in anything beyond our acquired ethical outlook itself, such as the findings of natural science, and this entails that their validation along *coherentist* lines would not be circular in any problematic sense. (165f., 240; Hursthouse 2004, 266)

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Thompson (2004) and Hacker-Wright (2009) for comparable approaches.

<sup>5</sup> Rehg and Davis (2003) argue that, since Hursthouse does not embrace a scientific concept of nature, her virtue ethics cannot count as genuinely naturalistic either. Yet, if 'naturalism' merely means the attempt at providing an explanation, validation, or justification in terms of nature, then it leaves open which concept of nature to employ. It seems that, in principle, nothing precludes a normative concept of nature from doing this work. Rehg and Davis deny this by pointing out structural analogies between Hursthouse's normative concept of human nature and a decidedly non-naturalistic Neo-Kantian concept of normativity. One may wonder, however, whether Rehg and Davis sufficiently heed the differences between these views and whether they do not, from the outset, formulate their criteria for a genuinely naturalistic concept of nature with scientism firmly in mind.

It is, however, not enough to point out the mere possibility of Neurathian self-criticism. In order to avoid accusations of vagueness, Hursthouse intends to clarify how exactly such self-criticism is to proceed by specifying the *standards or norms* that rationally ought to guide it. That way, she ultimately hopes to illuminate our practices of ethical reasoning and justification, as they shape our ethical outlook and thus our understanding of human nature. (167, 194f.; Hursthouse 2004, 166f.) To accomplish this task, Hursthouse adopts Philippa Foot's strategy of investigating the ethical use of the word 'good' in analogy to its non-ethical uses, in the belief that this contextualization will enable us to uncover the *public criteria* that govern it in such expressions as 'good human being' or 'good reason'. (Hursthouse 2012, 175-177)

Like Foot, Hursthouse takes as her point of departure Peter Geach's (1956) view that 'good' functions as a *logically attributive adjective*, which receives its criteria of application from the noun or noun group it explicitly or implicitly is combined with. Hence, what is good in a knife differs from what is good in a pencil, and whether a mildewed cactus is good or bad depends on whether we consider it as an eccentric art project or simply as an exemplar of its kind. Foot and Hursthouse maintain that we employ 'good' consistently in this manner across various areas of evaluation, which is why the *ethical evaluation* of human beings and their reasons equally receives its criteria from the very concept of 'the human'. Its standards are rooted in our species membership.<sup>6</sup> (195-197; Foot 2001)

In light of this, Copp and Sobel (2004, 536) and Halbig (2015, 182f.) have raised the question why the ethical employment of 'good' should receive its criteria from our species concept rather than from other concepts, such as those of our genus, genotype, a local group membership, or (as one might add) that of the person. Yet, once we consider the actual criteria these concepts supply, it becomes apparent why they are unsuitable. Regarding the genus concept, John Lemos (2007, 54-56) has pointed out that being a good exemplar of a genus typically consists in being a good exemplar of one of the species it subsumes. Just as a chair only counts as a good piece of furniture when it is a good chair, so a lion only counts as a good exemplar of the genus 'mammal' when it is, in the first place, a good exemplar of the species of mammal it is. Moreover, Lemos argues that the formation of local groups and communities fulfills a function in human life, and for that reason the criteria of goodness connected to such group memberships ultimately derive from our species concept. Hursthouse (2012, 178) herself advances a similar argument when she characterizes personhood as part of

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<sup>6</sup> But note that critics such as Hare (1957), Pigden (1990), and Halbig (2015, 180-182) have questioned whether we do in fact employ 'good' consistently in a logically attributive manner. While I believe we do, on a proper understanding of logical attributiveness, I cannot argue the matter here for reasons of space.

our development as human beings and hence subject to the same criteria. She claims that the concept of person, taken by itself and understood abstractly as “self-conscious being”, is not rich enough in content to generate criteria of goodness that could capture our actual practice of ethical evaluation (206 fn. 20). On her view, the same applies to the concept of genotype and its associated criterion of gene replication (285). Apparently, then, there are reasons why Hursthouse and Foot focus their efforts on the species concept.

In parallel to Foot, Hursthouse does not approach the concept of ‘the human’ directly but first sets out to investigate the criteria of goodness contained in other biological species concepts, as these are employed, for instance, in botany and ethology. In doing so, it is not her intention to make any scientific claims about the subject matter of these disciplines but rather to describe the practices of evaluation in which these concepts figure. Underlying her approach is the assumption that biological species concepts generally stand in something like a family resemblance relationship, as far as the structures or forms of evaluation are concerned that they give rise to. By developing these resemblances in detail, Hursthouse aims at establishing an analogy between our own species concept and the concepts of plants and the other animals—an analogy between their respective criteria of goodness that, she hopes, will facilitate articulating the criteria that guide the ethical evaluation of humans.

Yet, compared to Foot’s account in *Natural Goodness*, the specific structures of evaluation that Hursthouse uncovers on her way up the *scala naturae* turn out markedly more complex. On her view, the overall evaluation of a living individual as a good or bad exemplar of its kind generally turns on whether certain aspects of that individual are such as to fulfill certain natural ends, which characterize the life of organisms of its kind. In the case of plants, for instance, we evaluate their body parts and vegetative processes in relation to *individual survival* and the *continuance of their species*. Transitioning to the lower animals, we find two further aspects capable of evaluation, namely a capacity for active behavior and an at least minimal psychology of affects and desires, which regulates this behavior. Since this psychology introduces a new form of benefit and harm that can accrue to the individuals that possess it, it also generates a further natural end in terms of which all four aspects can be evaluated. This third end consists in a species’ *characteristic pleasure or enjoyment and freedom from pain*. Finally, the life of the higher animals, which are social beings and live in groups or communities, additionally is characterized by a fourth end, namely the *good functioning of the social group*, which essentially consists in the conduciveness of group life to the other three ends. According to Hursthouse, these ends are *interdependent* in the life of individuals of a particular kind, which means that one should not evaluate the goodness of

their aspects in terms of any one natural end taken in isolation, but in respect of whether they allow for the joint realization of *all* natural ends pertaining to that species. Hence, in thus limiting each other in terms of what can count as conducive to their realization, these ends substantially constrain and determine what the *characteristic*, i.e. good endowment and way of life for a given species consists in. (197-205)

Human beings too are social animals. This suggests that the structure of evaluation generally associated with the concepts of such animals could also apply to our own species concept. On Hursthouse's view, however, this is only partially the case because human beings essentially differ from other social animals in their *rational capacity*, which entails a structure of evaluation that diverges from theirs in crucial respects. On the one hand, our rational capacity introduces a fifth aspect in terms of which humans can be evaluated, in that it enables us to act for reasons and not merely, as the other animals, from inclination. (207) On the other hand, Hursthouse maintains that our rational capacity does *not* generate a fifth natural end, such as the life of theoretical contemplation or the preparation of the soul for the afterlife. On her view, our rational capacity does not merely add another dimension to the extant structure of evaluation but rather fundamentally *transfigures* the relation between our natural ends and the five aspects evaluated in terms of them. (217f.)

For non-rational living beings, what counts as the realization of their natural ends is more or less determinate by nature. That is, the goodness of their aspects takes on a definitive and largely identical shape in all individuals of the same kind, and hence enumerating the various parts and phases that make up a species' characteristic endowment and way of life does not pose a significant problem. Human life, in contrast, is marked by *enormous diversity*, in light of which it is hopeless to try and compile, at least beyond certain commonplaces, anything aspiring to an objective list that would enumerate, for instance, what our characteristic enjoyments are or how we characteristically tend to our offspring. On Hursthouse's view, this *natural indeterminateness of human nature* is due to our rational capacity. For whenever we are confronted with, for instance, a determinate way of living together in our social group, we can always question whether that way is well-founded or ought to be changed. We are thus capable of subjecting our way of life to criticism and can rationally modify those aspects we find wanting. Hence, the relation between the determinate shape of these aspects and our natural ends is, according to Hursthouse, essentially *mediated by reasons*. (218-222)

This transforms the character of the evaluation itself. The kind of evaluation non-rational living beings are subject to is essentially one in terms of health. Yet, when the issue is

whether someone is a good or bad human being, the form of evaluation is an essentially *ethical* one and as such primarily concerned with the rationality of our practical self-interpretation, and hence with the quality of our reasons. Correspondingly, given the singular and transformative importance of reason in human life, Hursthouse maintains that the overall evaluation of human beings as exemplars of their kind only takes account of those of their aspects that are *ethically relevant*, i.e. in principle open to be shaped by reason and choice. On her view, this expressly excludes the health of body parts and vegetative processes as irrelevant to overall evaluation and limits the pertinent aspects to actions performed from reasons, to our affects and desires, and to our occasional actions from inclination, insofar as these issue from our affective states. Since these aspects are open to rational cultivation, for instance in the course of upbringing, their determinate shape can be either rationally well-founded or not and is hence open to ethical criticism. It is no accident, as Hursthouse notes, that the *concept of virtue* specifically captures the goodness of these aspects.<sup>7</sup> (206-208)

Hence, the biological species concept of ‘the human’ is essentially that of a cultural being, which self-determines the specific shape of its form of life and does so in recourse to reasons: “Our characteristic way of going on, which distinguishes us from all the other animals, is a rational way. A ‘rational way’ is any way that we can rightly see as good, as something we have reason to do.” (222) According to Hursthouse, what we can rightly see as good is governed by the four natural ends that characterize social animals like us, for these provide the most general description of what human flourishing or *eudaimonia* consists in. In other words, the joint realization of these four ends determines the standard of practical rationality for human beings and thus represents the framework for evaluating the goodness of our reasons and ultimately the rationality of our practical self-interpretation. It seems then that Hursthouse has attained her goal of articulating normative guidelines for the Neurathian critique of our ethical outlook, which must underwrite any attempt at validating the reasons of virtue as actually and objectively good. (222-226)

Yet, this admittedly rather audacious proposal has prompted critics such as Copp and Sobel (2004, 540f.) and Halbig (2015, 191-194) to question the *normative authority* that the four ends allegedly exercise over practical reason. In case of non-rational living beings, the

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<sup>7</sup> Halbig (2015, 184-186) argues that the exclusion of health aspects from the overall evaluation of human beings represents a significant *breach of continuity* to other living beings, and that this seriously imperils the naturalistic character of ethical evaluation on Hursthouse’s account. It is important to note, however, that even among the other living beings there are significant differences regarding their aspects and natural ends. Clearly then, Hursthouse understands the continuity between the structures of evaluation that form part of different biological species concepts or natures *not* in terms of *strict identity* but rather in terms of *family resemblance*. Yet, speaking with McDowell, this allows for a ‘*relaxed naturalism*’ that is open to an essentially ethical form of evaluating living beings and a normative concept of human nature as essentially second nature.



normative authority of their natural ends is underwritten by the causal (and perhaps ultimately evolutionary) necessity with which exemplars of a particular kind, provided nothing interferes, tend to grow into and maintain a quite determinate way of life, which serves the ends that characterize their species. Yet, as Hursthouse emphasizes herself, since human beings are practically rational animals, they are not subject to this kind of necessity. Rather, we are free to query any given arrangement of human life and to do things differently, if that is what we judge is right. On the critics' view, this raises the question why then we should choose a way of life that satisfies the requirements of *these* ends in particular, instead of pursuing entirely different objectives.

One possible answer is provided by Julia Annas (2005, 17f.), who suggests that the authority of the four ends is based on some sort of causal necessity after all. On her view, Hursthouse understands these ends as a kind of *biological barrier* that practical reason is incapable of overcoming and therefore has to respect in fashioning a way of life for us. That is, human nature represents the *material* that our practical reason has to work on but cannot shape freely according to its wishes, because that material is recalcitrant. It is such as to limit the autonomy of practical reason in an essentially *non-rational* manner. Yet, as Annas' (2005, 25) own objections to such a view indicate, the four ends then no longer determine the standard of practical rationality, as they do not in any sense qualify our reasons. In order for them to be truly authoritative over practical reason, they must belong to its *form*, i.e. their authority must express not a causal but some sort of *rational necessity*. Yet, why should it be rationally necessary to pursue these four ends? As Halbig (2015, 191f.) observes, it is "simply not the case, neither descriptively nor normatively," that humans necessarily have to intend these ends, since they—as McDowell (1995) notably emphasizes—are practically rational beings and as such capable of distancing themselves from any supposed natural teleology inscribed in their species. Whatever normative authority such 'natural' ends can claim over us is, on McDowell's view, neither necessary nor automatic but *self-legislated*, i.e. it can only result from our free and historically contingent choice to accept it.<sup>8</sup>

However, this objection ultimately rests on a misunderstanding of the role that Hursthouse assigns the four ends. To clarify this misunderstanding, it is helpful to look at how Hursthouse responds to another objection, which is connected to her view that the standard of practical rationality is determined by the *joint* realization of the four ends. For our nature as practically rational animals makes us capable of evaluating the various aspects of our self-

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<sup>8</sup> Lott (2014) offers a systematic discussion of this objection as raised against neo-Aristotelian naturalism more generally.

interpretation not merely in relation to the four ends taken as a unity, but also in relation to any one of them in isolation from the others. This introduces the difficulty that, in contrast to other living beings, our natural ends can come apart and conflict in their requirements. (249-251) What then guarantees that we can even develop a self-interpretation that satisfies all of them at once? On Hursthouse's interpretation, this is precisely the question raised by Bernard Williams (1995, 109f.). According to Williams, the Darwinian refutation of natural teleology has revealed humans to be a chance product of evolution; a *bricolage* of randomly selected powers and instincts not organized according to any overarching purpose. It is therefore highly unlikely, he argues, that we are capable of ever bringing all of our needs and capacities into harmonious interplay. As the sorry course of human history demonstrates, on Williams' view, there simply is no well-functioning way of life for human beings, and therefore true flourishing will forever remain impossible to us. (256-260)

It is decisive for Hursthouse's reply that she does not regard the issue whether the four ends can in fact be harmonized as a matter of empirical discovery, but rather treats it as a question that needs to be settled *within* our ethical outlook. For that reason, she maintains that reference to the history of human life holds no real evidential value here because we cannot but read this history in light of our ethical beliefs concerning how human life generally works. Therefore, to read it as confirming the impossibility of human flourishing merely expresses a particularly pessimistic outlook on human life, which on Hursthouse's view ultimately amounts to a global form of moral skepticism. If humans, as a matter of principle, can never attain their *eudaimonia*, no matter what they do, then there is no point in even trying, which entails that it no longer makes sense to act on reasons and therefore practical reason itself turns out irrelevant. Hence, belief in the possibility of harmonizing the four ends represents a *necessary possibility condition of ethical thought* as such, for otherwise the entire enterprise of thinking about what to do would not make sense. We may not be able to verify this belief from an ethically neutral, empirical point of view. Yet, we in fact affirm it performatively whenever we participate in the practice of ethical reasoning and actually develop a practical self-interpretation, which means: inescapably all the time. (260-265; Hursthouse 2012, 182-184)

This is not merely true for the possibility of harmonizing the four ends, but also holds of these ends themselves. Thus, their normative authority does not rest on the claim that the realization of these ends in some sense of 'necessary' represents the ultimate object of our intentions, i.e. some kind of basic motivation from which all our other reasons are derived. On this 'intentionalist' reading, the four ends effectively act as some kind of ultimate practical

justification that provides us with a *foundation* for ascertaining the validity of the reasons of virtue, which then motivates us to acknowledge and actually follow them. Such a foundationalist approach sits badly with Hursthouse's explicitly coherentist commitments. As she repeatedly emphasizes, the four ends are neither meant to provide us with 'motivating reasons', nor are they required to. For we already follow virtuous reasons as a matter of course in the context of our everyday *praxis*, which means, on her view, that their goodness is from the outset already more certain to us than any philosophical 'ultimate' justification we could give it. Thus, Hursthouse's project of validating these reasons is not meant to create certainty where there was none, but rather to explain why we in fact treat such reasons as good.<sup>9</sup> (170, 180, 194; Hursthouse 2002, 50-52)

Given that the four ends typically do not enter practical thought as objects of intention, they do not form part of the intentional finality of rational action. Rather, they represent what we may call its *essential finality*, i.e. rational action by its very nature is such as to realize or contribute to these ends, even though that is not what we intentionally aim at in following good reasons. Hence, the attainment of the four ends represents an unintended consequence of rational action, and this *benefit* in part defines what it means to act rationally because it ultimately explains in what sense good reasons—and particularly the reasons of virtue—are good and carry a certain weight.

This attribution of an essential finality to rational action does not imply, however, that Hursthouse attempts to ground the normative authority of the four ends in some natural teleology allegedly inscribed in our species or its biology. Nor is she trying to derive such a teleology from an investigation of other living beings, with the aim of applying or imposing the results on our practice of ethical thought 'from the outside'. Rather, Hursthouse aims at explicating and articulating the general structure or *form of ethical thought* as it is manifest in our first-personal practice of it, i.e. 'from the inside'. That is, the 'teleology' or finality she attributes to practically rational action is not external but in fact internal to and constitutive of it, even though it is not intentional in form. The chief difficulty here resides in how to make sense of a finality that is *internal* to practical thought, i.e. somehow understood in it, yet not *intentional*, i.e. not constituted by any *explicit* thought about ends, means, or specifications of

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<sup>9</sup> A variant of the foundationalist picture also underlies Gowans' (2008) charge that a "straightforward application of the Teleological Criterion" (52) allegedly formed by the four ends will not yield anything resembling our morality, and that in particular moral universalism cannot be derived from it. That is, Gowans treats the four ends as a criterion that we can apply *to test ethical beliefs directly*. Yet, this is not Hursthouse's intent. Although the four ends are meant to guide ethical thought and argument somehow, they are *not* meant to effectively replace it with a quasi-technical decision procedure of this kind.

ends.<sup>10</sup> As a means of investigating this special kind of finality, Hursthouse's analogy to other biological species concepts does not play a foundational or grounding role but merely serves as an auxiliary to explication.

In the end, both the natural-teleological and the intentionalist readings of her project overlook that Hursthouse (16) herself attributes an essentially *Wittgensteinian* character to it. If interpreted in this light, her actual view seems to be that the four ends represent *necessary possibility conditions of ethical thought as such* in that they constitute the basic context or horizon that renders ethical reasoning intelligible to us; a context that is *implicitly* understood whenever we reason about what to do. Put differently, these ends provide the basic framework for understanding the very meaning and point of ethical claims and thereby act as intelligibility conditions of any ethical argument. This is why, whenever we engage in such argument, these ends qualify our reasons with rational necessity. In Wittgenstein's terminology, they represent 'hinge propositions' that form part of a description of the *logical grammar* that in fact governs the language game we call 'ethical reasoning'.<sup>11</sup> (265; Hursthouse 2002, 51-53)

On this account, the normative authority of the four ends is underwritten by the fact that they are constitutive of the very form of ethical thought, and consequently of the *form or nature of human practical reason itself*.<sup>12</sup> Thus, when Hursthouse states that our evaluation of the reasons of virtue is subject to a "mixture of constraints imposed by nature and the ethical outlook" (229), she does not imply that the autonomy of reason is limited by something external to it. Rather, she makes the point that our *material conception of good reasons*, which represents our ethical outlook and as such is formed by tradition and handed down to us in upbringing, is itself constrained by certain *formal norms of reason* in the guise of the four ends. Hence, on Hursthouse's view, the form according to which practical reason necessarily proceeds in its self-legislation is not, for instance, that of the categorical imperative. Rather, it essentially relates to our very humanity.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Müller 1992 for a discussion of this essentially 'unreasoned' teleology.

<sup>11</sup> For 'hinge propositions', cf. Wittgenstein (1974, §§341-343) and Schönbaumsfeld (2016). In her attempt at uncovering the logical grammar of ethical thought, Hursthouse (208-211; 2004, 269-271) not only argues that the reasons of virtue in fact reflect these four ends, but also that other ethical theories contain traces of them. In line with Wittgenstein's therapeutic conception of philosophy, these theories are thereby shown to be one-sided or otherwise defective explications of our actual practice, which ultimately threaten to corrupt it.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Hacker-Wright (2013) for a similar interpretation of the four ends. For a critical perspective, cf. Brüllmann (2013).

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