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Making Sense of Categorical Imperatives*

Abstract: Naturalism, as Binmore understands the term, is characterized by a scientific stance on moral behavior. Binmore claims that a naturalistic account of morality necessarily goes with the conviction “that only hypothetical imperatives make any sense”. In this paper it is argued that this claim is mistaken. First, as Hume’s theory of promising shows, naturalism in the sense of Binmore is very well compatible with acknowledging the importance of categorical imperatives in moral practice. Moreover, second, if Binmore’s own theory of moral practice and its evolution is correct, then the actual moral practice does—and in fact must—incorporate norms, which have the form of a categorical imperative. Categorical imperatives are part of social reality and, therefore, any (normative) moral theory that adequately reflects moral practice must also include categorical imperatives.

0. Introduction

Ken Binmore gives an interesting account of moral action in the tradition of David Hume and the British Moralists. Starting from some simple premises about the nature of man he tells us a story of how morality may conceivably have evolved over time, and, thus, provides us with insights that contribute to a better understanding of actual moral practice. Binmore draws on Hume’s concept of a moral convention explicating it in modern terms of game theory and the theory of evolution. Some of his arguments are based on speculative assumptions, such as the idea that men apply specific (Nash-, egalitarian or utilitarian) bargaining solutions to coordinate action, which might seem questionable. But I will not be concerned here with these issues. I am rather interested in the relationship between a basically explanatory theory as Binmore presents it and normative ethics proper. If Binmore’s explanation of morality is correct (and I believe some such theory must be correct), does that entitle us to any normative claims about justified action?

As a famous passage in the *Treatise*, which has become known as ‘Hume’s Law’ (Hume 1978, 469), demonstrates, Hume was well aware of the gap between empirical or demonstrative knowledge on the one hand and normative reasoning on the other hand. And so is Ken Binmore. Of course, he would not want to

* I am indebted—as always—to Hartmut Kliemt. I have been discussing the principal matter with him for quite a time. He is a hard defender of the non-cognitivist creed that all justification ought to be instrumental, and, so, he is fiercely against what I am writing here. But—again, as always—what I am writing here has its ultimate roots in his fine teaching.

suggest applying his theory directly to justifying action. However, he obviously does believe that his theory adds something to normative moral theory.

As a matter of fact, Hume was very cautious in the formulation of his verdict. He did not actually say that it is categorically impossible to proceed from an is- to an ought-statement. He rather recommended being very watchful if such reasoning occurs as it is generally highly problematic and requires strong justification. Indeed, Hume and most of his followers did proceed from their explanative theory of moral action to statements about what ought to be done.

At least since John L. Mackie wrote his *Ethics* (1977) one normative, metaethical conviction has been very common among modern non-cognitivist—or, as Binmore might classify them, ‘naturalist’—moral philosophers, namely that all justification ought to be instrumental, or—as Binmore says—“that only *hypothetical* imperatives make any sense” (43). I will argue here that this is mistaken. Moreover, if Binmore’s theory of moral action is correct then morality must encompass some categorical imperatives.

The argument proceeds as follows: I will first state some very general common sense observations about practical reasoning, explanative reasoning, and the relation between the two to organize the background of the argument. A characterization of what Binmore calls “moral naturalism” (2) and of the concepts of “hypothetical” and “categorical” imperatives (3) serves to make more precise what can be meant by the statement “that only *hypothetical* imperatives make any sense”. A short discussion of Hume’s theory of promises illustrates that naturalism in Binmore’s sense is consistent with a moral practice incorporating categorical imperatives (4). A simple example taken from Binmore’s book then shows (5) that, as a matter of fact, categorical imperatives must be part of moral practice if morality is evolving along the lines outlined by Binmore himself.

1. Reasons—Practical and Explanative

Explanation as well as justification of action both answer to questions of the same linguistic form: “Why ...?”. Moreover, in a justification of an act we may refer to the same sort of states of affairs as in an explanation: “Because I am your brother you should care for my welfare”, “Because you are my brother you are naturally inclined to give some weight to my welfare”. Both ways to refer to a state of affairs go under the same heading of ‘giving a reason’. All reasons have an evaluative or normative dimension: they justify something. But reasons given in a context of the justification of an act directly justify the act while reasons given in an explanation of an act may serve to justify the belief that the act actually is, was, or will be performed (if the reason applies).

I will refer to a reason given to explain an act as an *explanative reason*¹ (of action) and to a reason (maybe a reason referring to the very same state of affairs—as in the example before) given to justify an act as a normative or *practical reason* (of action). Since practical reasons justify acts while explanative reasons justify beliefs about action the two relate to action in different ways. An explanative reason for an action is good or valid if it does in fact justify the belief that the action is performed. A belief is justified to the extent that it must be true. Therefore, a valid explanative reason raises the probability that the act be performed, and, in fact, a sufficient explanative reason guarantees the act being performed. In contrast, a valid practical reason for an act justifies performing the act but it can never suggest on its own whether the act is being performed or not. It is logically possible that there is a valid and sufficient practical reason to perform ϕ without ϕ being performed. The corresponding statement about explanative reasons is untrue.

All this is simple folk wisdom. Explanative reasons do not automatically translate into practical reasons and vice versa. Hatred may explain murder but it does not justify it. A promise to ϕ justifies ϕ -ing but there may be a perfectly valid explanation of an act ϕ that does not refer to a promise although the promise to ϕ was actually given.

However, explanative reasons and practical reasons are not independent of each other. This is due to the role that practical reasons may play in action to be explained by explanative reasons. As we understand ourselves, human beings are rational animals, i.e. they act from reasons. If Eve does ϕ for the reason R call R Eve's *motivating reason* to ϕ . In motivating reasons practical reasons and explanative reasons meet. In deciding what to do R justifies doing ϕ for Eve. From the actors viewpoint R is a practical reason justifying ϕ . Knowing that Eve is motivated by R to do ϕ an outside observer can explain why Eve does ϕ : She does it because of R. And this explanation is perfectly correct irrespective of whether R in fact justifies ϕ -ing or whether the external observer believes that this is the case or not. In this respect R is an explanative reason for (Eve's) doing ϕ from an external viewpoint.

All justification is general in much the same way as explanation is. If a reason R justifies doing ϕ under certain circumstances then it will also justify doing ϕ , ceteris paribus, at another relevantly similar occasion. So reasoning about action is subject to claims of coherence. Moreover, practical reasons may relate to each other by logical or causal dependence. If R is a reason to do ϕ and S entails R then S is, prima facie, also a reason to do ϕ . In this sense, a reason itself may be justified by its derivation from other reasons.

Practical reasoning about action is not only a reflective enterprise, guided by general and, more or less, abstract principles, it is also a social enterprise. Justification of an act is primarily addressed to other people. By justifying

¹ Some argue that all explanative reasons refer to causes. Following Wittgenstein others have contested this claim. In particular, it has been denied that motivating reasons used in an explanative context (see beneath) are causal in character (see Gustafson 1973 for a first overview). Nothing in my argument hinges on whether all explanation is causal or not. So I prefer to leave this intricate question open using the more general term of an explanative reason instead of causal talk.

an act we are making a claim that can be criticized and discussed by others, most notably those affected by the act. This presupposes that there is some shared practice of justification based on commonly shared principles of practical reasoning.

As I understand it, normative moral theory, or Ethics, is concerned with a theory of practical reasoning. Its principal aim is to formulate a coherent system of normative principles to be used in justifying action. Some have claimed that Ethics should also justify its basic principles. But it is unclear what this means. To justify an action is to give a valid normative or practical reason for the action. The theory tells us by reference to its principles how to distinguish good reasons from bad ones. So one could say that the theory justifies (using) certain reasons for action. But how can it justify its own principles? Such an endeavor would either be circular or it had to be done without reference to the principles. So another theory of justification would be needed. What is this theory and how is it justified? However we proceed we seem to be condemned to rely on some principles of justification, which themselves cannot be justified again.² Rawls (1972) has given a stylized account of the way out of the dilemma. It is possible to provide justifications without having to depend on ‘skyhooks’ (as Binmore might say). By the method of reflective equilibrium we may gradually approach a collection of coherent principles that optimally reflect our considered moral judgments.³ This, I believe, is the appropriate method of normative moral theory.

An explanative theory of moral behavior is related to normative moral theory in this sense in at least two ways. First, as practical reasons motivate action they have to be considered in any explanation of action. An explanative theory of moral behavior will, thus, have to determine the practical reasons that motivate moral action and it will have to explain how it comes about that these very reasons are effective (but remember: explaining that people act from certain reasons does neither justify their action nor does it justify accepting these reasons). Second, the practice of justifying which is to be reflected by a coherent collection of principles in moral theory is itself part of moral action and something to be explained by an explanative moral theory. While moral theory is a (normative) theory *of* practical reasoning an explanative theory of moral behavior is—at least in part—*about* practical reasoning as a social fact. The two relate to the extent that the actual practice of moral reasoning is reflected in moral theory.

2. Naturalism

Some argued that justifying the principles of normative reasoning is just a matter of empirical science because all moral principles can be reduced to statements of fact by way of translating all normative terms into equivalent ordinary descriptive terms. This is what philosophers usually call ‘moral naturalism’ and the

² Cp. the concluding section in *Natural Justice* (200) about the impossibility of justifying the fairness principles!

³ On the concept of reflective equilibrium see Hahn 2004.

object of Moore's famous criticism. Binmore does not seem to understand this criticism. If we have doubts whether something is being correctly identified in naturalistic terms, then, Binmore argues, this does not imply that it is impossible to identify it in naturalistic terms at all. But this is beside point. Moore does not deny that there may be a collection of ordinary descriptive terms, which is, under certain conditions, coextensive with "good" in a normative sense. His argument is not concerned with *identifying* what is good but with the *meaning* of normative concepts. If, in some context, the things that are "good" in a normative sense are those and only those things that (also) have the natural properties A_1, A_2, \dots, A_n , this is a contingent fact that cannot be analytically deduced from the meaning of the term "good". There is no definition of "good" in terms of natural properties A_1, A_2, \dots, A_n just as Smith cannot be defined as "the man in the blackraincoat" (although he may be identified in this way).

But Binmore has no reason to defend moral naturalism in the sense that Moore gave to the term. As I understand Binmore he would not want to claim that normative concepts could generally be defined in terms of ordinary descriptive concepts. If he refers to himself as a "naturalist" he means something else:

"In biology, a naturalist is someone who gathers facts about living creatures, and tries to organize them into a framework that avoids speculative hypotheses about supernatural or metaphysical entities. When I call myself a naturalist, my use of the term differs from this biological usage only to the extent that I focus on the moral behavior of the particular living creatures called human beings." (42)

A naturalist in this sense is a person who looks at nature with the attitude of science. There can be no doubt—and I do not think that there are reasonable persons who doubt—that this is the one and only appropriate attitude in any attempt to generate relevant descriptive knowledge about the empirical world. And, of course, human beings and human behavior, in particular moral behavior, are part of this empirical world. "Justice as a Natural Phenomenon" is a proper object of science, and naturalism, as Binmore uses the term, is the only truly scientific approach. But a moral science in this sense is explanatory, it is concerned with understanding and explaining the natural, historical and social facts that found and make up moral behavior, whereas normative moral theory is concerned with basic principles of justifying action. As I have argued there is no direct route from explaining to justifying. It is, nevertheless, possible to draw some crucial conclusions from an explanation of moral behavior to the content of an adequate moral theory.

David Hume's theory of knowledge by experience may serve as an illustration here. After Hume gave an explanation of how humans acquire empirical knowledge by reference to the general properties of the human mind and, in particular, to custom, he proceeded in formulating eight (normative) principles of causal reasoning (Hume 1978, 173 ff.). He did not argue that his explanative theory of empirical knowledge justifies these principles. From the particular understanding of the practice of causal reasoning that is provided by his explanative theory he just extracted the principles that guide such reasoning.

In the same way moral science as an explanative project can provide us with a deeper understanding of the practice of moral behavior and the practice of justifying action, which is part of it. If moral theory is the attempt to formulate a coherent system of principles, which adequately reflects this practice, then it is to be informed by moral science. In fact, I believe, that this is the central idea of all normative reasoning within the project of moral science as endorsed—and in a way started—by Hume and the British Moralists. Which normative principles adequately reflect moral action and reasoning depends on what the moral practice is actually like. Therefore, moral science does determine the object of (normative) moral theory to some extent. It sets constraints on which principles can reasonably be included in moral theory.

If Binmore's commitment to naturalism is taken seriously his statement that "naturalists think that only hypothetical imperatives make any sense" (43) must be understood in this way. He cannot be making a normative or metaethical claim based on some justificatory moral theory. He is rather telling us something about moral practice, namely, that only hypothetical imperatives may play a decisive role in that practice. The consequence for moral theory is: If other than hypothetical imperatives may be derived from a collection of normative principles then that collection cannot be part of an adequate moral theory, whatever its principles may be. No categorical imperatives may be part of or implied by an adequate moral theory.

3. Categorical Imperatives

An imperative is—according to Kant—the linguistic form of a "command of reason" ("Gebot der Vernunft"; Kant 1968, 41). It is a rule telling us what we ought to do. John L. Mackie gives a concise characterization of Kant's distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives:

"If you want X, do Y' (or 'You ought to do Y') will be a hypothetical imperative if it is based on the supposed fact that Y is, in the circumstances, the only (or the best) available means to X, that is, on a causal relation between Y and X. The reason for doing Y lies in its causal connection with the desired end, X; the oughtness is contingent upon the desire. But 'You ought to do Y' will be a categorical imperative if you ought to do Y irrespective of any such desire for any end to which Y would contribute, if the oughtness is not thus contingent upon any desire." (Mackie 1977, 27 f.)

So hypothetical imperatives are conditional on certain ends in the following sense: they are addressed to individuals who actually have certain ends and they demand compliance only to the extent that the individuals do have these ends. Hypothetical imperatives may have the same linguistic form as categorical imperatives. In particular, a hypothetical imperative may not explicitly formulate the ends that it presupposes. On the other hand, a categorical imperative may be conditional in that it prescribes to do an action ϕ only on condition

that certain conditions apply, and these conditions may even involve that the addressee of the imperative has certain goals. So, the distinction does not draw on whether the commitment to do what the imperative calls for is conditional or not, it rather focuses on how certain ends may function as a reason for action. A hypothetical imperative tells you that your ends provide sufficient reason to do ϕ because ϕ is the best means to realize your ends. In contrast, a categorical imperative demands doing ϕ ,—period. ϕ may suit your ends, but this is not why you ought to ϕ . You ought to do ϕ because this is what the imperative says,—because ϕ -ing is the right thing to do if the condition of the imperative applies.

4. Promising

Although Kant introduced the conceptual distinction, David Hume before him fully noticed the implications of the fact that moral imperatives might have that peculiar form that is now known as a categorical imperative. Such imperatives are characteristic of those virtues that Hume calls “artificial” (see Hume 1978, 518 f.). One of his prominent examples is the promising norm: If you promised to ϕ , you ought to ϕ . Whatever your ends are, after you gave a promise you are not free to choose the best way in achieving your ends. In fact, this seems to be the whole point of promising. If people were still free to do what they wanted after a promise was given, what would be the use of giving a promise? So, you ought to do ϕ , irrespective of your ends, because you promised, and because promises are to be kept.

How can a promise—the utterance of some words—, Hume asks, give us a reason to act in a certain way? If there is such a reason then it will provide us with a new motive to act. But the only motive beyond those reasons that exist independently of the promise is what Hume calls a “sense of duty” (Hume 1978, 518). Now, a sense of duty presupposes that there is a duty, and, as Hume understands it, this in turn requires that some motive is effective, which is generally appreciated by individuals observing the action. However, this motive cannot be again the sense of duty as such reasoning would lead into an argumentative circle.

So how is the (categorical) promising norm possible? Hume asks this question not in the manner of Kant as a matter of a priori reasoning about the transcendental prerequisites of autonomous rational action. He is asking the earthly question of how it comes about, that men are motivated in such ways, and he does it in a perfectly naturalistic way in the sense that Binmore gives to the term. His explanation of the obligation to keep promises as a social and psychological fact proceeds in two steps. Here is a brief outline of his argument:⁴

Step 1: The promising norm is originally one of the principal rules of a convention that singles out an efficient equilibrium in ongoing exchange. Promising arose as part of a social practice that extends and modifies the rules of cooperative exchange between people, who have some concern for each other’s

⁴ A detailed account of Hume’s theory of promises is given in Lahno 1995.

welfare—as is, for instance, true within a family—, to exchange of goods and services between people with (partly) conflicting interests. A promise is used to mark an intended exchange as being subjected to the rules of this convention. In equilibrium following the rules is optimal for each participant in the practice. This applies, in particular, to the promising norm: Whoever gives a promise “... is immediately bound by his interest to execute his engagements, and must never expect to be trusted any more, if he refuse to perform what he promis’d” (Hume 1978, 522). Thus, “... interest is the *first* obligation to the performance of promises” (Hume 1978, 523; emphasis by Hume!).

But this first obligation, which is solely based on interest and which Hume calls a “natural obligation” (see, e.g., Hume 1978, 498, 545, 551), cannot on its own establish a sense of duty, which does not necessarily coincide with the actual interests of a promisor. This leads us to

Step 2: “Afterwards a sentiment of morals concurs with interest, and becomes a new obligation upon mankind.” (Hume 1978, 523, see also 533) Keeping promises is advantageous to those concerned and the common practice of promising supports the public good. As men tend to sympathize with others the consequences of action in accordance with what is promised elicit positive feelings in an observer. These feelings are transmitted onto the act: we approve of the act. The tendency of approval is further generalized as a result of the natural predispositions of men and their social conditions of life:

- As a result of the general properties of learning processes approbation becomes relatively independent of the actual consequences of action.
- A natural tendency to avoid inconsistencies in our judgments and feelings makes us strive for a general point of view that may bring about consistency both within our own judgments and feelings as well as among the judgments and feelings of our group.
- A natural tendency to subsume judgments under general rules complemented by the reconciling consequences of social intercourse results in the emergence of a general social standard.
- The whole process is the object of individual and social reflection. With the general emergence of social approval intensity and force of social sanctions are increased. Moreover, compliance with the norm becomes the object of systematic education.

In the end norm compliance is detached from the direct pursuit of interest. We approve of someone keeping his promises whether we like the consequences of his action in the particular case or not. And we are equally motivated to some extent to keep our promises independently of whether this suits our actual interests or not. The norm becomes a reason on its own, which motivates us by our ‘sense of duty’: We keep our promises because this is what we ought to do. Note that the ‘sense of duty’ as derived in Hume’s theory is soundly founded in the psychological and social nature of human beings. It is by no means a ‘skyhook’ (neither is Rawl’s ‘sense of justice’ or his ‘natural duty’; cp. 151).

Step 2 is not just a peculiarity of social evolution. It is one important reason why the social practice can spread and endure even in larger societies, which, as Hume says, are characterized by the fact that “in our own actions we may frequently lose sight of that interest, which we have in maintaining order, and may follow a lesser and more present interest” (Hume 1978, 499). The social practice is still based on interest—compliance with the norm is by and large and in the long run an optimal strategy—but compliance cannot be maintained by individual opportunistic utility maximization alone. Although it is in their interest, people do not entirely act *for* their interest when they observe the norm. A different motivational mechanism ensures the advantageous equilibrium of the social practice.

At least as far as the step 1 is concerned Binmore’s explanation of norm compliance is closely related to Hume’s. I think Hume’s explanation is still a fairly good one. But whether this is so or not, the lesson to be learned here is this: There is no principal conflict between a scientific approach to morals and the acceptance of categorical imperatives. In other words: Naturalism in the sense of Binmore does not by itself imply that “only hypothetical imperatives make sense”. If Binmore makes this claim as a ‘naturalist’ he must refer to the specific naturalist reconstruction of the evolution of morals that he gives. But, as I will argue in the next section, his approach does not allow for such a strong conclusion. Like Hume’s approach it rather suggests that categorical imperatives play a decisive role in moral practices and, therefore, should also be reflected in moral theory.

5. Coordination Rules

Binmore argues that morality—or, to be more precise, the fairness norm—evolved as an equilibrium selection device. Multiple equilibria constitute a principal problem for the theory of rational action. As Binmore says (68): “... attributing rationality to the players isn’t enough to resolve the equilibrium selection problem”.⁵ To illustrate the problem we may look at Binmore’s example of a Stag Hunt Game:

		B	
		<i>dove</i>	<i>hawk</i>
A	<i>dove</i>	4 4	0 3
	<i>hawk</i>	3 0	2 2

Stag Hunt Game

⁵ The problem has been extensively discussed by different scholars, most notably by Margaret Gilbert 1989; 1990 and Robert Sugden 1991; 1993.

At first sight it may seem reasonable that both actors should and would choose *dove* in a situation like this. (*dove, dove*) is not only the unique efficient equilibrium it also promises the overall best result to each of the individuals.⁶ What seems reasonable, however, is not necessarily rational in the sense of rational actor theory. To see this take a closer look at the situation from the viewpoint of a rational actor A.

What A should do depends on what B is going to do. If B plays *dove*, *dove* is A's best choice, too. But if B chooses *hawk*, A should also choose *hawk*. As usual in game theory it is assumed that A is perfectly informed about the options and preferences of his partner B. Can rational A on the given information reasonably expect rational B to play *dove*? What reason can he have for such an expectation? As B is in the same position B will play *dove* if he expects A to do so. So A should have a reason to expect B to have the expectation that A will choose *dove*. But, again, since B is in the same position, B can have a reason for such an expectation only, if he expects A having the expectation that B chooses *dove*. Obviously such reasoning can go on endlessly without ever reaching solid ground. There just is no independent reason for any expectation of any order available. Any solution of the problem in a population of rational actors in the sense of rational actor theory must presuppose that either one of the actors acts in some way or other for no decisive reason or that at least one of them does perform some acts on behalf of expectations that he cannot decisively substantiate.

It is easy to see how a social norm solves the problem in real life circumstances. If such a norm exists people will share the conviction that playing *dove* is reasonable and, in fact, 'the right thing to do', i.e., they will accept the norm as a binding standard of behavior under the given circumstances.

What is the character of such a norm? Can it be understood as a hypothetical imperative merely expressing that playing *dove* "is, in the circumstances, the only (or the best) available means to" realizing the ends of an actor as represented by his utility values? Yes, it can: *If* there is in fact a practice according to the norm, then an individual can use the norm as a guide in pursuing his ends. But the practice itself cannot be entirely based on the behavior of people maximizing their utility in this way. If all are exclusively motivated by their ends as given by their utility values and use the norm only as far as it is a sufficient guide to these ends then the norm ceases to be such a guide. Should I act according to the norm? I should if others comply also—then and only then the norm is an effective guide. Will others comply? Well, they are in the same position ..., so the story starts again. The norm, if generally understood as a hypothetical imperative, loses all its force.

There ought to be some people who accept the norm as binding whatever their other preferences are. This is their reason to play *dove*. And—as the argument shows—this reason cannot be reduced to rational utility maximizing. That people act on such reasons reveals that they have a commitment to a rule of conduct that transcends pure instrumental rationality (see Sen 1976, 329).

⁶ But notice that (*hawk, hawk*) is the risk dominant equilibrium.

To be sure, complying with the norm is de facto maximizing behavior in a society where the norm is effective,—and it must be, otherwise it would not be stable over time. But rationally maximizing utility cannot be everybody’s primary reason for compliance; and so the norm cannot be understood as a pure instrumental rule that describes the optimal way to one’s ends, an optimal way, which is determined independently of the norm by one’s interests and the circumstances alone. It cannot be a shared conviction (it cannot be common knowledge) that interest is generally the only moment of action. If this were the case interest would disappear as a reason to abide by the norm in a bottomless pit of strategic interdependence, and, with it, the norm, if understood as a hypothetical imperative only, would become ineffective.

If I am right, any social practice that resolves an equilibrium selection problem must incorporate some understanding of norms as categorical imperatives. So categorical imperatives are part of social reality and they do make sense. Were there not at least some people committed to the norm, the norm could not effectively operate as an equilibrium selection device. If moral theory is to reflect moral practice, then it seems that it must also include categorical imperatives.

6. Conclusion

A scientific approach to morals does not per se exclude that categorical imperatives make sense. Quite the contrary, within an explanative theory of morality we have to concede that categorical norms—as, for instance, the promising norm—do play a significant role in moral practice. And—as Binmore’s argument in fact shows—this is not just a curious coincidence of cultural evolution, it is a precondition for morality to function as an efficient coordination device. If this is so, any normative moral theory, which reflects moral practice to some extent and which makes claims on being an authoritative behavioral guide, will have to include categorical imperatives in some way or other.

Binmore’s claim that only hypothetical imperatives make sense is motivated by his deep skepticism about the possibility of the entire philosophical project of normative moral theory. If there is such a thing as rational justification of action then, Binmore thinks, it is to be based on knowledge about matters of fact. But then we face the problem of deducing an ought from an is. It is Binmore’s conviction that hypothetical imperatives provide the only measure to bridge this gap; they tell us what to do by reference to means end relations, i.e. by reference to what is (see 43). But they don’t bridge this gap. That it may seem otherwise is a consequence of the fact that we are all too ready to do ϕ if someone convinces us that doing ϕ is the best thing to do if we want to achieve our ends. We are prepared to accept a hypothetical imperative if we think it is based on a correct means end relation. But this allows only for the inference that hypothetical imperatives are easily enforced. We *want* to comply with hypothetical imperatives,—but *shall* we? The gap between is and ought is not becoming any smaller just because the resistance to the ought is. The leap

across the gap is to be made, but how and with what justification? We are told: “Just do it, it doesn’t hurt!” That should make us watchful!

I do not think that we should always do what best suits our wants. But whether this is true or not, it is a normative conviction, too, that we should comply with a hypothetical imperative. An imperative can never—in no way—be deduced (solely) from knowledge of matters of fact. Once we realize that even hypothetical imperatives do not provide a way to evade Hume’s Law we may become more open to the idea that normative moral theory is a rational enterprise categorically different from natural or social science. Still, as I have argued, this enterprise is to be informed by empirical and explanative theories of morality. It is in this regard that Binmore makes an important contribution to the project.

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