People for the Ethical Treatment of Ethics

Raam P Gokhale
“Aesthetics is the most subjective while mathematics is the most objective of disciplines; ethics lies in the middle.” – Kedar Joshi

"You can’t get an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’." – Common paraphrase (author unknown) of David Hume’s argument against what has come to be known as the naturalistic fallacy

“Your ought to be able to get an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’, therefore you can.”—Raam Gokhale’s paraphrase of the preceding paraphrase.

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**Scene & Players**: Ram, Kedar, Sushama are strolling around the Rose Garden, a small park near Ram’s apartment.

**Kedar**: You know all these red roses remind me of the Mary’s Room argument we had in the ‘Are We Three?’ dialogue. As homage to our ongoing dialogues, perhaps we should call this one ‘Are We Ethical?’

**Ram**: Don’t you think it’s a bit premature to start paying homage to ourselves?

**Sushama** (chuckle): I don’t know about that but ‘People for the Ethical Treatment of Ethics’ is too reminiscent of—too much a homage to—People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. I think PETA’s priorities are a little mixed up: People for the Ethical Treatment of People needs to be addressed first.

**Ram**: It’s good to discuss first what should be discussed first. Accordingly I think you two will agree that meta-ethics should come before ethics, hence I think the title I’ve chosen—which is clearly meta-ethical—is most apropos in spite of being inspired by PETA.

**Sushama**: Amusing peritrope!

**Kedar**: That’s very Aristotelian of you, Ram, and Kedarian too—meta-ethics before ethics. But just to play devils advocate, some would say the history of western civilization shows how much more productive it is to do ‘blank’ before ‘metablank’…to focus on physics, for example, before metaphysics.
**Sushama**: Good point. I would only add that just as it may be more ‘productive’ to do physics before metaphysics, the modern trend in ethics seems to be in the direction of applied ethics rather than meta-ethics. Ironically this is due to the problems the ‘productions’ of physics and the other sciences have posed for the modern world. For instance, many philosophy departments these days have added Environmental Ethics to their curriculum, several offering advanced degrees in that subject.

**Ram**: We can claim to have done it both ways. Our ‘Prison Through a Philosophic Prism’ dialogue fell squarely in the realm of applied ethics while here we can at least start with meta-ethics.

**Kedar**: I assume your ordering of our quotes as usual has something to do with the direction you expect the dialogue to take?

**Ram**: Yes, order counts.

**Sushama**: Hmm… all the quotes seem meta-ethical, though the last I’m least sure of. Kedar’s quote certainly represents the pre-theoretical way of looking at things. But I have to wonder: is ethics in the middle of mathematics and aesthetics or is it rather off to the side?

**Kedar** *(scornfully)*: Whatever do you mean?

**Ram**: No, I think I understand what Sushama is saying. Kedar’s quote reminds me a bit of Walter Pater’s famous one about music—that music is the art toward which all other arts aspire. When I was into poetry, I didn’t agree with that. And just as poetry has its own canons, ethics’ canons should be analyzed on its own terms, with a meta-ethic that doesn’t hearken towards the ‘objectivity’ of mathematics. People should be for the *ethical* treatment of ethics as it were. Do I have you right, Sushama?

**Sushama**: Mostly. A hierarchy of knowledge is reminiscent of Plato with the form of the good presiding over all. Whereas investigating the cannons of each discipline in its own right is much more Aristotelian with the separate purpose of each discipline governing its own standards.

I think the separate standards, ‘off to the side’ view of ethics is also a good answer to the second quote, you know, the Hume-paraphrase quote: you can’t derive an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’. I agree but say neither should you even try.

**Ram**: Yeah, Hume’s entire philosophy seems devoted to showing all the things you can’t derive from what is, whether it be morality or necessity or even personal-identity in the case of his bundle theory of mind. Then Berkeley also
showed that you can’t derive physical objects from sensations, though he’s more usually viewed in relation to Locke. The whole tone of modern philosophy as that period is called is a series of negative results: philosophy pales in comparison to science and can at best be an ‘under-laborer’ of it to use Locke’s deference-reference to Newton.

In fact, I was thinking of this in connection with Kedar’s Mary’s Room comment inspired by all these lovely red roses: Mary’s Room almost turns modern philosophy on its head, showing you can’t derive sensations from physicalist facts, that science can’t totally preempt philosophy. In that dialogue, of course, I nevertheless argued that the argument doesn’t succeed in the larger enterprise of showing sensations are not caused by purely physicalist facts.

Anyway as I argued in ‘Taking up the Cause of Causality’, the total cause of an effect does entail the effect. This is in a Hempelian sense though in that dialogue I make room for a metaphysical necessity alongside Hempel’s purely logical one. Taking the parallel to ethics, perhaps an examination of the totality of what is, and by that I mean to include human nature, we can kind of derive an ought from an is: if ideal morality is ‘caused’ by human nature along with certain boundary conditions, and if causes entail effects, what is—human nature—can entail what ought to be.

Kedar: As usual Ram’s got the cart before the horse: our system of morality shapes individual human natures, that is our characters are shaped by the rules our parents lay down, not the rules shaped by our characters.

Sushama: Don’t you think it’s like solutions in chemical equilibrium—the arrows go both ways? The rules shape our characters but the collective character of humanity also determines the rules.

Kedar: OK maybe.

But hey, how about all these references to past dialogues—I thought we weren’t going to pay homage to ourselves.

Anyway I have a quote relevant to your comment Ram. The quote is: “Ethics without metaphysics is an impossibility”.

Sushama: Interesting quote but for what Ram’s saying I think you need the converse or inverse I’m not sure which (I know it’s not the contrapositive): namely, “Metaphysics makes ethics possible”.
**Ram:** It’s the inverse, Sushama and it’s another way of echoing my rejection, or at least modification, of Hume. What ultimately is (Metaphysics) entails should be (Ethics).

By the way, speaking of rephrasing quotes, what did you guys think of my quote, “You ought to be able to get an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’, therefore you kind of can.”?

**Sushama:** It’s interesting but I have two questions: first, what sort of ‘ought’ is the first ‘ought’? Second, how can you say ‘therefore’—I don’t see the logical connection. Perhaps that’s why you are now weakening the quote from the original with the phrase, ‘kind of’.

**Ram:** Let’s tackle the easier question first. The first ‘ought’ in the quote is an aesthetic ought as I suspect all meta-blank subjects are motivated by aesthetic considerations about their blank subjects. The second, ‘therefore’, question is as Sushama intimated, trickier, but I suspect ethics can be justified in aesthetics just as the consistency of number theory can be proved if we assume set theory.

**Kedar:** There goes Ram again, drawing mathematical parallels. What is it this time? Let’s see: both number theory and ethics can rank and order their elements by ‘greater than’ and ‘less than’ relations; while both set theory and aesthetics group sometimes similar sometimes disparate elements—Ram’s connection of ethics and aesthetics itself being I suspect an instance of the latter.

**Sushama:** Don’t be so critical Kedar! I think I see where Ram is going with this. In fact an aesthetic ‘ought’ explains why ‘meta-blank’ subjects, metaethics especially, often seem like so much armchair philosophy as compared to the main subjects, which like ethics, seem to have greater import and urgency. That being said, I’m not sure how you can justify ethics in aesthetics.

**Ram:** Let me try to formulate the argument I have in mind, though it’s a little sketchy at the moment. Let’s see: it would be aesthetically pleasing to be able to derive an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’. This should be an acceptable premise as the countless efforts at such a derivation in the history of philosophy testify. Second, things are aesthetically pleasing to the extent that they capture a feature of reality—also I trust an acceptable premise. Therefore, since you aesthetically ought to be able to derive an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’, you kind of can, i.e. there’s a feature of reality that the proposition captures.

**Kedar:** I only have one objection. We may speak aesthetically and truthfully and say that Beethoven ought to have composed a 10th symphony. But whatever
feature of reality that ‘ought’ captures, it doesn’t follow that Beethoven did compose a 10th symphony.

**Ram:** Granted. But we also say things like, ‘The mathematics of string theory is so elegant that string theory has to be true.’ And even in your Beethoven example, when we say he ought to have composed a 10th symphony, we are capturing a feature of reality: namely, that Beethoven’s genius was so undiminished by age and deafness that he would’ve composed a brilliant 10th symphony had he lived long enough.

**Sushama:** So what the Beethoven example shows is that while it’s true that an aesthetic ‘ought’ implies some kind of ‘is’, it’s not clear what kind of feature of reality the aesthetic ‘ought’-statement captures. It might not be as simple as decoupling the first ought from the statement.

**Ram:** Good point Sushama! Let me try something simpler which just came to me: it is widely recognized that ‘ought’ implies ‘can’. So when we say, ‘You ought to be able to get an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’”, the first ought implies the possibility of what follows, namely you can get an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’.

**Kedar:** What pure sophistry! ‘Ought’ implies ‘can’ only if the ought is an ethical ought. We can only say someone ought to do A if it’s possible for him to do A. The same implication doesn’t exist for other uses of ‘ought’. Aesthetically, if you will, we may say, ‘We ought to be able to fly.’ That doesn’t imply we’ll ever be capable of unaided flight.

**Ram (a bit dejected):** Touche Kedar! I guess I got too clever for my own good.

**Sushama:** Don’t be too down on yourself Ram. Too much cleverness is an occupational hazard for philosophers.

**Ram:** OK, let me see if I can regroup. If an ‘is’ can justify an ‘ought’, perhaps we can make some headway by asking ourselves what sort of justification it would be. Specifically, in ‘Just-if-ication’ we considered three broad types of justification: induction, deduction and abduction. We can ask ourselves what broad argument form among the three, justification of an ethical theory from a true state of affairs would take.

**Kedar:** If I may: induction seems the most promising, deduction and abduction being a matter of logic which I going along with Hume think cannot be a way to ground ethics. From particular instances where lying for instance has had bad consequences, we may generalize or induce and say lying in all instances has bad consequences.
Sushama: I disagree Kedar. Induction will never allow you to get to a moral ‘bad’, from lying has bad or unpleasant consequences to lying is morally bad.

Kedar: We don’t disagree Sushama. I was only following the most promising avenue available. I never thought it would lead anywhere as I with Hume think you can’t get an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’...but we have to humor Ram.

Ram: Humor me a little longer, Kedar. I think the justification we want is in fact quite common, namely one of the means-ends variety. Such arguments can be formalized as deductive arguments though in this case, the ends by themselves don’t entail the means.

Not to be too cagey, the argument starts like this.

If you want to be happy, to live the good life, then human nature being what it is—namely that “man is,” as Aristotle said, “a social animal”—, you ought to live in society.

Next, if you want to live in a society, then societies being what they are, you ought to abide by its just rules. Here ‘just’ is understood as a kind of Nash equilibrium where the best strategy to pursue is to follow your own interest while taking account of everyone else’s interest.

Sushama: Excuse me—Nash equilibrium?

Kedar: That’s just Ram trying to cram as much math into the dialogue as possible.

Ram: Fair enough. But the idea is pretty simple: you achieve the best results if you strive for a larger share of society’s pie but also if you strive to increase the total size of the pie.

Which leads me to the last part of the argument, namely, if you want to live in the best society in the sense of one most conducive to your happiness, then again human nature being what it is, you ought to work to improve its laws and regulations.

Note this obligation to work can be understood most minimally as ‘voting with your feet’ and going to a different society or maximally as the surprisingly many cases of altruism demonstrate.

Sushama: Yeah, I’ve read an ‘is’ based account of altruism recently—The Selfish Gene, I think it’s called, by Dawkins.
Ram: I don’t need to take it to the genetic level for the purposes of my argument, Sushama. I don’t even need the true premise, humans are sometimes genuinely altruistic.

I don’t need it because of a more common if less noble phenomena. As societies compete for survival by competing for members, the ‘voting with your feet’ that I mentioned can itself contribute in a negative way to improving a society’s laws and regulations. That by the way is I think the proper answer to ethical relativism. What the existence of other moirays shows is not that there is no basis for comparing them, but rather that we are actively searching for the best ‘moirays’ possible—for example, consider the reasons usually given for why the pilgrims decided to go to America: they voted with their feet or rather their ships. This struggle between moirays is not only natural but ought to be promoted with the ought understood again in the means-ends sense where the end is the happiness of a society’s members.

Sushama: Overall, this is the familiar ‘state of nature’ type argument that’s been used by the likes of Hobbes and Locke, though by classifying it first as means-ends and then by carefully going through each step, you’ve systematized it more than most.

Kedar: There’s nothing new under the sun.

Sushama: Each breeze under the sun is a new and welcome refreshment, Kedar, even if it only stirs around what’s already existing. My only comment is I am not sure the ‘ought’ you’ve derived from an ‘is’ is an ethical ‘ought’. I mean the ought only directs us to act so as to maximize our own happiness. Shouldn’t goodness be for goodness sake?

Ram: I can answer your question with the following analogy. Consider a game, say monopoly. To explain the players’ actions we would allude to the rules of the game, the function of the property cards, the dice, etc. But suppose someone asks why the players are playing. The proper answer is that they’re playing for enjoyment.

Similarly if we’re asked to explain purported ethical behavior in a society, we would appeal to the system of rights, laws and customs of that society. But if we’re asked as philosophers often are, ‘Why be ethical?’ the correct answer is, given human nature, that is the most reliable road to individual happiness.

We can cast this in Aristotelian terms. Ethical behavior, like game playing, can be explained with a formal cause which is the structural character of a thing that makes it what it is. This in the case of ethical behavior is a society’s system of
laws, individual rights, etc. which characterizes each action as good or bad. For games it is the rules of the game which characterize each move as a legitimate move of the game. But subjects can also be understood in terms of a final cause. In the case of both ethical behavior and game playing, the final cause is happiness, or as Aristotle would say *eudaimon*, though individual actions may have more proximate ends such as the good of fulfilling a promise. The fact that we can analyze ethical behavior in terms of either cause needn’t diminish the importance of the other cause. It all depends on what sort of understanding you want.

**Sushama:** Very interesting. The Aristotelian explanation in terms of different but equally valid causes nicely straddles the argument in contemporary ethics between which ethical notion should be primary, the good which consequentialists favor or the right which deontologists favor. Like most people, I always thought each concept had its place, but didn’t know how most effectively to expand on that.

**Kedar:** It’s always nice to make sense of contemporary debates by drawing on Aristotle, but I must say, have you answered Sushama’s (and my) question?

**Ram:** Ah, Santa Claus ethics…should we be good but for goodness sake. Perhaps the game analogy helps here as well.

If, in the middle of monopoly, someone asks me why I bought Park Avenue, I wouldn’t say because it’s fun, I would say, ‘Park Avenue has the highest rent, i.e. I would give an explanation in terms of the formal properties of the game, not the game’s final rewards. The lesson to draw is that particular actions are explained by the rules and goals of the game which in ethical terms is to be good. So just as we fulfill a promise for the proximate final cause that it is good to fulfill a promise, so perhaps in all particular cases we can make sense of the phrase, ‘Be good for goodness sake’. But if we’re searching for justification of ethics overall—doing armchair philosophy, to use Sushama’s phrase—, we can say the collective set of our ethical actions are best explained in terms of the enjoyment that living an ethical life provides.

**Sushama:** Interesting. You’ve almost spanned the entire philosophical alphabet from the four causes of Aristotle with an A to an analogy with games reminiscent of Wittgenstein with a W. I especially like how the formal cause/final cause analysis sheds light on the debate over ethical relativism. Just as an acorn might have some mutation in it that prevents it from being a tree, so a society may have something wrong with it that prevents it from maximally promoting its members’ happiness.
Kedar: I think Ram is perfectly happy to have everyone forever be less than perfectly happy, to assert that all societies fall short of the ideal of maximally promoting their members’ happiness.

Ram: You’re right Kedar. The final cause may be like the carrot at the end of the stick that’s affixed to our hat: we ever strive toward the perfect society but never reach it. But the full analysis of the formal cause—the system of rights and laws which are at least implicitly a real feature of all societies—is in terms of the final cause, the carrot, the state of maximal happiness that they are for the sake of.

Kedar: I’d like to get back to your claim that the first ought in your quote, “You ought to be able to get an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’…” is an aesthetic ought. I mean means-ends are very practical considerations, not at all aesthetic. So while you may’ve grounded ethics, why should it be in aesthetics?

Ram: Well perhaps the answer has to do with the particular type of means-ends argument this is. The means here, namely the laws and regulations of a given society, are an artifact of human production. They are produced for the sake of promoting the greatest happiness for that society’s members. Politics, the complexity of legislation, to paint with the palette of baser pleasures as well as more lofty ones for when we grow up and tire of the former, is as challenging an artistic task as any.

Kedar: Hmm…sewers are artifacts too…and incidentally where most actual political ‘artists’ belong. Do you want to argue for an aesthetic of sewers?

Sushama: C’mon that’s too harsh an indictment, Kedar. Political science, which Ram has in mind not actual politics, can claim to rise above the muck of the latter and be evaluated on aesthetic grounds.

Ram: Thanks Sushama. But maybe the reason the first ought in my quote is an aesthetic ought is because as we said earlier: ‘why be ethical?’, metaethics in general, is just so much armchair philosophy, concerned more with theoretical elegance than the good.

Anyway, the ‘artifacts’ point suggests another argument against ethical relativism, namely if ethical systems are artifacts, why shouldn’t they be compared, evaluated and ranked as all other artifacts of man are?

(a pause)

Sushama: I’d like to get back to The Selfish Gene book I mentioned. According to it, happiness, like its opposite, pain, is simply a way genes have of accomplishing their purpose which is survival and propagation through time.
So it would seem happiness is not the final final cause. To stick with Aristotle’s terminology, though Dawkins wouldn’t, happiness is at best an efficient cause.

**Ram:** I have no real problem with that. I can reformulate my ought-from-an-is argument as: Since our genes want to survive, we should live in society and so on.

**Kedar:** Hold on! That threatens to take ethics out of the picture entirely, to keep philosophy subordinate to science as we earlier said modern philosophy was content to do.

And, in a related point, I also think the ‘should’ in “Since our genes want to survive, we should live in society” is misplaced. The proper word to use is ‘would’, as in ‘intelligent vehicles of genes would choose to live in society’. This is because science can at best predict behavior, not prescribe it.

**Ram:** That’s a valid point. We sought to put ethics on a firmer footing by deriving an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’. The problem is now ethics might be swallowed up by science entirely. Indeed grounding the subject and yet preserving its independence is the Scylla and Charybdis of ethics.

I think the proper response is the following. Why certain things make us happy and others do not may have a genetic basis just as why a tree is a final cause of an acorn may have still more basic explanations. Still that doesn’t prevent them—happiness and trees—from being final causes in legitimate subjects in their own right.

So you’re right: though you can kind of derive an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’, the derivation does not thereby render the ‘ought’ unnecessary; ethics can remain a legitimate field of inquiry, just as chemistry stands alone despite being further decomposable into physics.

**Sushama:** That’s not a good analogy Ram. Both chemistry and physics answer the ‘what is the case’ question. Ethics asks what should be the case and Hume was right to call attention to the transition. The derivation of an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’, if valid, is unique to ethics, or rather metaethics, so I don’t think any analogy will work.

**Kedar:** There is Ram’s game analogy…

**Ram:** Yeah, it’s interesting. When we were ranking on the basis of objectivity we cited Kedar’s quote that ethics is in the middle of mathematics and aesthetics. Now we have another spectrum, namely of seriousness: games are the lightest of subjects and ethics the most serious. We might well wonder why despite being
extremes, they share the characteristic that they make prescriptions based on what is the case.

The answer is that both concern actions and actions—whether light or serious—have both a purpose and factual conditions relevant to the accomplishing of that purpose. The purpose produces a ‘should’ and the factual conditions are relevant in a justification. That’s why in both games and ethics, we can derive an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’. Or as Aristotle might’ve said, both utilize practical syllogisms.

**Kedar:** I’m not in favor of going ‘whole hog’ on Aristotle as you Americans say—I mean the whole hog part, not Aristotle who Americans probably equate with Onassis. But I can’t help but wonder: we have a formal and final cause for ethical actions—is there also an efficient cause, a material cause?

**Ram:** OK. The efficient or ‘push-pull’ cause we already alluded to, namely happiness and also preferences conditioned by happiness.

**Sushama:** Interesting distinction. I’m curious to hear how you’ll build on it.

**Ram:** What I have in mind can be explored by considering two sentences which on surface appear similar: ‘I like eating ice-cream’ and ‘I like playing tennis’. Despite their grammatical similarity, the difference is I eat ice-cream in anticipation of the pleasure I will experience; I don’t play tennis in anticipation of the pleasure I will experience—I play tennis because I like to play tennis. Perhaps this difference is due to the more complicated pleasure of tennis: I don’t experience happiness from each and every aspect of it whereas the case with ice-cream is simpler and more clear-cut.

**Kedar:** To tie back to your distinction, I assume the efficient cause of ice-cream-eating is happiness whereas the efficient cause of tennis-playing is a preference conditioned by happiness?

**Ram:** Exactly, Kedar. I propose moral behavior is more like tennis-playing than ice-cream-eating in that our actions in both cases are explained by the fact that we like the activity itself and not principally the pleasure attendant on completing the activity. Aristotle makes this distinction too and I think it is another clue into why we sometimes, like Kant, think moral actions should be done for their own sake, though in my opinion there’s nothing wrong with deriving pleasure from them.

**Sushama:** Uh...just to lob the ball back in your court...your tennis analogy only underscores the need to characterize the particular type of happiness that is the efficient cause—or final for that matter—of moral actions. I mean happiness is the
cause of all actions whether they be eating ice-cream, playing tennis, or fulfilling a promise. Don’t we need to say what kind of happiness causes the last as distinct from the first two?

**Ram:** You’re right Sushama. But the answer is simple. The particularly moral type of happiness is one which takes the happiness of others into account as well. I haven’t seen this discussed in the literature but we learn this kind of happiness as babies, by the contagious joy of smiles, laughter and in general good times. The peculiar nature of shared joy—that it is contagious and makes us feel good—conditions us to delight in the delight of others. That is how happiness conditions preferences which in adults cause moral behavior sometimes without the anticipation of happiness, though happiness or satisfaction usually follows.

**Kedar:** To quote Darth Vader, “Obi Wan never told you about the power of the dark side, Luke!” Or less melodramatically, remember slapstick: we delight not only in the delight of others but oftentimes in their pains as well. In fact there is a theory that all humor is based on the misfortunes of others.

**Ram:** Well that would only be an objection if I were committed to a fundamentally good view of human nature, which I need not be. Right now I’m only concerned to trace the efficient cause of moral behavior. In our relishing from a young age slapstick humor, you may’ve identified the efficient cause of immoral behavior, but that doesn’t detract from the argument that the contagious joy of smiles, etc. conditions us to delight in the delight of others and creates in us an inclination for moral behavior, though there may be counter-inclinations as well.

By the way, though I like your styling yourself as Darth Vader and me as Luke, you are not my father.

**Kedar:** Not even philosophical father?

**Sushama:** Ahem, Yoda here...ha, ha I couldn’t resist...I too believe in the genuineness of immoral as well as moral behavior, i.e. I’m not disposed to regard evil as mere ignorance of the good as the sometimes too rationalistic ancient Greeks or Hindus. But I’m not sure the tendency to enjoy slapstick is the root cause of immoral behavior. For one thing, too many of us enjoy a little slapstick and I find it hard to believe we are all to that extent evil. After all, a man slipping on a banana peel and bruising his ego is funny but him cracking his skull as a result is not.

**Ram:** Good observation Sushama! I shouldn’t have been so quick to give up on the basic goodness of most people. What your observation shows is that
appreciation of slapstick actually points to the good side of our characters. We’re amused at the banana-peel victim *merely* bruising his ego because we’re relieved—since we tend to expect the worst—that he didn’t further crack his skull.

**Sushama:** Hmm, I don’t know if you realize this but your smile and slapstick hypotheses meet one test of good scientific theories. They yield testable predictions. The world has many societies with different morays. If you’re right you’d expect what we’d regard as perverse societies to have different smile and humor dynamics with their young. There might even be explanations for the different dynamics in terms of the more dire struggle for survival individuals in those societies face.

**Kedar:** Math and science too—Ram must be in philosophical heaven. But how about the material cause for moral actions? That is, if we’re to stick with arguably outdated Aristotelian methodology…

**Sushama:** Oh the classics are timeless Kedar and will repay contemporary reexamination. In fact I read an article recently that may be relevant here. It compared genus with material cause. Thus moral actions are a species of actions and therefore their material cause may be voluntary actions.

**Ram:** I couldn’t agree more. And in ‘Allowing for Every Contingency’, we discussed free actions. Anyway here I’ve been trying to show the way in which an ought can be derived from an is. What did you think of the resultant system?

**Kedar:** I don’t know…voting with your feet, pilgrims, monopoly…I think the system you’ve envisioned is very American.

**Ram:** I can only respond with another Americanism: and your problem with that is?