

# Why Do Anything?

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Yes, I know that it's weird to use numbered sections when there's only one of them. Surely you're not surprised that I'm weird?

## 1 Is it impossible to get from an “is” to an “ought”?

Suppose that you start with an empiricist perspective. You have observations, and you have rules of inference. From those, you are supposed to be able to derive anything that counts as a truth.

Thus you encounter (what we philosophers call) the “is/ought chasm.” It doesn't seem that you can reach anything like a “should.”

And that in a very broad sense. You can't derive a reason to do anything.

And so (if you are a certain sort of person in a certain sort of mood), you don't. Do anything, that is.

And then what? Do you just sit there, doing nothing, until you die?

In my experience, no. (Or at least, not yet.) After a while, you feel the need to pee. Or you get hungry. And so you act accordingly.

Wait, what? What does “accordingly” mean here? Didn't we just say that, starting with observations and rules of inference, you cannot derive a reason to do anything?

Not exactly. We said you can't derive an “ought” statement. From “I am hungry,” you can't derive “I ought to eat.”

And indeed, you can't. Not strictly, reliably, that is. Perhaps you have taken a vow that you will fast all day, today. If so, it would not be weird for you to—even consciously—be aware that you are hungry, yet not draw the conclusion that you ought to eat.

And yet . . . . Suppose I hear you say that you are hungry. And you haven't taken any vow of fasting, at least not that I know of. (Nor anything “like that.”) I would certainly not be surprised if you then went to the kitchen, brought back some food, and ate it. (I'd be a little bit surprised if you didn't.)

But doesn't this conflict with our earlier statement that one cannot derive an “ought” from an “is”? Have we disproven that statement—shown, at any rate, that it is not universally true?

I don't think so. But that is going to take some explaining.

And my current intention is to do that explaining in an entirely separate document, which hasn't been written yet. Furthermore, the *ostensible* focal topic of that piece will be different from this one's: its purpose will be to suggest a way to decrease political polarization.

Maybe it will seem evident that the "political polarization" topic is at least somewhat related to that at which I've been waving my hands here. If not, wait and see.