

## **JAMES RACHELS** - HOW TO DERIVE AN 'OUGHT' FROM AN 'IS'

This, however, has a surprising implication for the idea that we cannot derive “ought” from “is.” Rather than explaining why such derivations are impossible, it helps to explain how they are possible. In 1964 Max Black offered this example:

- Fischer wants to checkmate Botwinnik.
- The one and only way to check mate Botwinnik is for Fischer to move the Queen.
- Therefore, Fischer ought to move the Queen.

Black argued that this is in fact a valid chain of reasoning: if the premises are true, the conclusion must be true also. But the premises concern only matters of fact. They include no “ought” judgments. The conclusion, however, is about what ought to be done.

Thus it seems that we can derive “ought” from “is.”

Hume was wrong, then, to say that we can never derive “ought” from “is.” But he was wrong for a reason that his own analysis exposes. If our premises include information about a person’s relevant desires, we may validly draw conclusions about what he or she should do. This result is not out of keeping with the spirit of Hume’s view. Indeed, it is probably better to express Hume’s view as the idea that we cannot derive ought-judgments from facts about how the world is independently of our desires and other attitudes regarding it. That is the point of Hume’s Guillotine.

(James Rachels , Naturalism, pages 8,9)

1. What is James Rachels’ argument here?
2. Does he satisfactorily bridge the is/ought gap?