

Attitude and Social Rules, or Why It's Okay to Slurp Your Soup

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<www.philosophersimprint.org/021028/>*

A finger bowl is a bowl of water. After the entrée, it is placed before the dinner guest, who dips her fingers into the water and moves the bowl to the left of her plate. Judith Martin, a.k.a. Miss Manners, relates the following story about Queen Victoria and a dinner guest who did not know how to properly use his finger bowl:

At a great London banquet, dear Queen Victoria lifted her finger bowl and drank the water. She had to. Her guest of honor, the Shah of Persia, had done it first.¹

In one sense, Queen Victoria did precisely what she was required to do. She drank from her finger bowl, some would say, because she understood the *true purpose* of etiquette: to respect the dignity of others.² But in a more mundane sense, of course, Queen Victoria acted improperly. The correct way to use a finger bowl is to dip one's fingers in it. That is the point of the story: she violated a rule because she valued something else more highly. This distinction is fairly common in the philosophical literature on manners, though it is only sometimes made explicit.³ I use the term "table etiquette" to refer to the kind of rule, if such things exist, that Queen Victoria *obeyed* — rules of table behavior that *essentially* involve respect for others. I use the term "table manners" to refer to the kind of rule that Queen Victoria *violated* — simple social rules concerning forks and finger bowls, which require behavior that sometimes expresses respect for others but other times causes embarrassment or social exclusion. My use of these labels is entirely stipulative. And it is debatable whether table etiquette, as I understand it, even exists. But we can set any such controversy aside because this paper is *not* about table etiquette. It is about the less profound but more tractable variety of social rules: table manners.

1. Martin (1979), p. 24.
2. Kass (1994), Buss (1999), Martin (1979), and Calhoun (2000).
3. Buss (1999) and Johnson (1999), p. 219. For those who make this distinction and focus on what I would call "etiquette," see Stohr (2012), pp. 4, 42, 167, and Scapp & Seitz (2007), p. 5.

The practice of table manners is — in some broad sense to be discussed in greater detail in the following section — normative. It consists not of regularities of how people behave at the dinner table but of rules for how people ought to behave at the dinner table. Here is the question: Can a practice that is normative in this sense be captured by a theory that appeals only to descriptive states of affairs?⁴ Or, what comes to the same given the notion of *normative practice* employed here, can a rule or system of rules be captured by a theory that appeals only to descriptive states of affairs? This question has been central in other philosophical domains, and in each case, it has seemed to many that the answer must be no.⁵ A central debate in philosophy of law for the last two centuries concerns whether positivist accounts of law — many of which are descriptive, reductive accounts of law — can accommodate the “normativity of law.”⁶ In parallel, a central debate in the philosophy of language over the last three decades concerns whether causal, informational, or dispositional theories of meaning — all reductive in some sense — can accommodate the controversial “normativity of meaning.”⁷ In each case, it is thought that any descriptive account leaves out the relevant normativity.⁸

4. Coleman & Leiter (1996), p. 241, and Perry (2006), p. 1176.
5. This problem need not be motivated by any particular reading of Hume’s brief comments about “is” and “ought” in Book 3 of the *Treatise*. The question of whether normative facts can be reduced to descriptive ones has rightly puzzled many even if it did not puzzle Hume in that particular passage. Bix (2006) includes a good discussion of the problem and Hume. Another good discussion of the general issue, couched in terms of reasons, is at the heart of Scanlon (1998). Scanlon is fond of open-question arguments against reductive theories of reasons. In a sense, these open-question arguments are a paradigm of the traditionally Humean concern.
6. See Enoch (2011), Coleman (2001), Marmor (2008), Postema (1982), Perry (2006), and Fuller (1969).
7. See Kripke (1982) and subsequent controversy, including Boghossian (1989), Bilgrami (1993), Papineau (1999), Rosen (2001), and Wikforss (2001).
8. This worry is reminiscent of those that Gilbert (1989), Marmor (1996), and others had in relation to Lewis (1969). And these are themselves descendants of Kripke (1982). This issue also has significant overlap with debates about naturalism in the metaphysics of ethics. For clear statements of naturalism,

My view is that once we are clear about the exact sense in which these practices are normative, we can see that the answer to the above question is yes — it is possible to give an adequate theory of a normative practice by appealing only to descriptive resources. The problem, however, is that law and language have elicited so much philosophical attention that little about them is uncontroversial, and, as a result, presenting a reductive theory of them requires a great deal of space. Luckily, it is possible to present the core of such an account, and to avoid some red herrings, by focusing on a simpler practice: table manners. Those familiar with the debates about the normativity of law and the normativity of meaning will not have difficulty seeing the connections between what I say about table manners and those more established debates. But the focus of this paper is table manners, not law or language. My hope is that it will take only a few more pages for the genuine philosophical curiousness of table manners to interest us in its own right.

This paper can be divided into two halves. The first half considers two lines of thought that seem to suggest that giving a descriptive account of table manners is impossible. The first line of thought, which is discussed and rejected in section 1, holds that the practice of table manners is intrinsically normative in a way that rules out descriptive reduction. The second, which is discussed and rejected in section 2, holds that the central role that rules of table manners contingently play in human life and civilization makes descriptive reduction impossible. Having somewhat cleared the way for a metaphysical account of table manners that appeals only to descriptive states of affairs, the second half of the paper presents and defends an account of this type. The account, which occupies sections 3, 4, and 5, is inspired by H. L. A. Hart, but the arguments defending it are original.⁹

see Boyd (1988), Jackson (1998), and Railton (2003). For a good overview of this issue, see McPherson (2015).

9. The one exception to this may be the response to the Warnock counterexample that appears in section 3. As is made clear in that section, the general direction of my response is preceded by Kramer (1999) and Green (1999), but the details are original. For other applications of Hartian insights to

1. Is a Reductive Account of Table Manners Conceptually Possible?

As noted at the outset, the practice of table manners is normative. And it is natural to think that normative phenomena cannot be explained in terms of descriptive states of affairs. But there is a distinction — newly prominent within the philosophy of law and other philosophical subfields — between *robust* rules or norms that are the appropriate objects to be treated in deliberation as counting against or in favor of actions and *merely formal* rules or norms that are more than mere regularities of behavior but that fall short of giving genuine reasons for action.¹⁰ Merely formal rules can, of course, sometimes, as a matter of contingent happenstance, carry robust normative force. So we will understand a practice, consisting of rules, as itself robustly normative if and only if, as a matter of necessity, its rules are robustly normative.¹¹

normative practices, see Southwood & Eriksson (2011), Brennan et al. (2013), and Epstein (2015). Woods (2018) also presents a compelling Hartian account of etiquette, but the focus there is less on presenting an account of the existence of rules of etiquette and more on an argument that we have reason to follow such rules.

10. For similar distinctions, see Copp (2004), McPherson (2011; 2018), McPherson & Plunkett (2017), Broome (2013; 2015), Leiter (2015), Lord & Maguire (2016), Plunkett & Shapiro (2017), p. 48, Berman (2019), p. 138, Enoch (2019), and Plunkett (2019), pp. 113–115. Also, Parfit (2011) briefly and suggestively draws a similar distinction between rule- and reason-involving conceptions of normativity (pp. 144–146). See an opaque and brief passage in Dworkin (1986), pp. 136–137, and the normativity/norm-relativity distinction discussed by Hattiangadi (2007), though it is crucially different in that norm-relativity is understood to be behavioristically reducible. Lance & O’Leary-Hawthorne (1997) make a distinction between the “attributive” and the “transcendental.” Their distinction, however, concerns types of normative judgments and the meanings of normative terms. Sellars (1954) presents a clear rule/regularity distinction. See also Hart (1961), p. 56. Finally, as a point of clarification, none of the distinctions drawn here are the same, even in extension, as the regulative/constitutive rules distinction discussed by Searle (1969) and others, the moral/conventional distinction discussed by Southwood (2011) and others, the internal/external reasons distinction made famous by Williams (1981), the distinction between different ways of reason-giving defined by Enoch (2011), or the Kantian distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives. Also, I use the terms “norm” and “rule” synonymously. See Dworkin (1977).
11. For instance, table etiquette, introduced briefly in the beginning of this paper,

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Is merely formal normativity even possible? Are there rules that do not generate or constitute genuine reasons for action? A quick argument by example seems adequate for answering both questions in the affirmative. Consider a system of conventional morality that prohibits sodomy.¹² In some cases, of course, such rules will be robustly normative. If one’s sexual practices are not private, then one may have prudential reason to obey conventional morality. And if one made a promise to obey conventional morality, then one may have moral reason to obey conventional morality. But if neither of these things are the case, and if this rule of conventional morality is misguided, then it seems that there is still a rule — sodomy is still *forbidden*, even if it is not *immoral* — but that it lacks robust normative force. One who wishes to maintain that all rules are robustly normative has two options in response to cases of this sort; one of them seems intolerable and the other simply implausible. The first option is to deny that mistaken rules of conventional morality are really rules. This is a departure from both (a) ordinary language and (b) the most common technical notion of a rule according to which the existence of a rule entails that some evaluative or deontic concept applies to behavior that meets or fails to meet the relevant standard.¹³ Even if such a rule of conventional

would be a robustly normative practice (if it exists at all). That is because we presumably have reason to show respect for the dignity of other human beings and, as a matter of stipulation, all rules of etiquette show respect for the dignity of others. If some behavior, in some particular circumstances, does not respect others, then, by definition, that behavior, in that circumstance, is not required by table etiquette. Of course, descriptive facts might “trigger” underlying normative considerations in such a way as to generate new, more specific norms. But in order for triggering of this sort to be a feature of table manners in such a way that theories of table manners would have to account for it, the triggering would have to be not just occasionally but necessary, which seems implausible in this case. See Enoch (2011), Buss (1999), and Foot (1972). For examples of triggering accounts of other phenomena, see Raz (2006), p. 1103, and Dworkin (1977).

12. I am following many, including Coleman (1982), in using the term “conventional morality.” Lewis (1969) calls this “social morality,” as does Hart in the Postscript. Austin (1832) calls it “positive morality.”
13. By “applies to” I mean *is truly predicated of*. See Sellars (1954) and Hart (1961), p. 56.

morality is mistaken, it is still true to say that, within the relevant society, sodomy is *forbidden*. It is bizarre to maintain that mistaken rules of conventional morality are not rules. The second option is to admit that rules of conventional morality are rules but to insist that in all cases where one has no moral or prudential reason to obey conventional morality, one has a genuine reason to obey them. It is hard to see what the source of this robust normativity could be. And it is even harder to see how this alternative source of robust normativity would *necessarily* attach to rules of conventional morality such that when it is absent, the rules are as well.

The question is: In what sense is the practice of table manners normative? If it is normative in the sense that it necessarily generates reasons for action, then purely descriptive theories face a significant challenge. This is not to definitively say that robust normative “ought”s cannot be fully explained by appeal to facts about what “is.” It is merely to say that philosophers have seen this as a non-trivial task at least since Hume’s suggestive passage in Book 3 of the *Treatise*.¹⁴ Luckily, however, the practice of table manners is not plausibly normative in this robust sense. At least, it does not generate genuine reasons for action *as a matter of conceptual necessity*. As we are understanding them, there is nothing about these rules being rules of table manners that entails that they have anything other than merely formal normativity. That is, at least as a matter of conceptual necessity, they are merely normative in the sense that they are *rules* and not mere regularities. Normativity of this type is much less of an obstacle to descriptive reduction.

Nonetheless, it is—and this is a crucial point that is apt to be missed—still *somewhat* of an obstacle. Merely formal normativity is still a non-trivial explanandum. The fact that a practice consists not of mere behavioral regularities but of rules or norms precludes the possibility of behaviorist theories. It very plausibly also precludes the

14. In addition to the Hume, see Bix (2006), Enoch (2011), Coleman (2001), Marmor (2008), Postema (1982), Perry (2006), Fuller (1969), Bilgrami (1993), Papineau (1999), Rosen (2001), Wikforss (2001), and Boghossian (1989).

possibility of theories that additionally appeal to the characteristic mental states of Humean belief-desire psychology.¹⁵

And it is in precisely this way that merely formal normativity warrants the title “normative.”¹⁶ The existence of a rule entails that some evaluative or deontic concept applies to instances of behavior.¹⁷ So, because there is a rule against slurping soup, that behavior is not merely *uncommon* but is *impermissible*. Normativity of this kind is, perhaps, not as significant as robust normativity. But it is *something*. It places a genuine constraint on theories of table manners, ruling out several otherwise attractive theories.

Of course, one might insist that the label “normative” be reserved only for robust, reason-generating phenomena. After all, it is only if the practice of table manners exhibits robust normativity that facts about that practice directly affect what we ought to do. I am happy to cede the terminological territory to those who are committed on this point. Ultimately, it is relatively unimportant what label we use for the fact that some practices consist of rules. What is important is that this is a feature of table manners, and it is one that rules out certain behavioristic and Humean theories of that phenomenon. What is needed to explain the practice of table manners is a theory that makes use of richer explanatory resources. The second half of this paper presents and defends a theory of this sort.

2. The Function of Table Manners

But before presenting this kind of descriptive theory, we should consider a notable fact about table manners that might seem to rule out the possibility of descriptive reduction. Table manners are important.¹⁸

15. Principally, I have in mind Lewis (1969). For criticism of Lewis on just this point, see Gilbert (1989) and Marmor (1996).

16. See Leiter (2015).

17. This does not entail, of course, that *all* evaluative or deontic concepts apply to those instances of behavior. The rule against slurping soup makes that behavior not *immoral* or *foolish* but *forbidden* or *impolite*.

18. See Stohr (2012), p. 3.

Both the philosophical literature on manners in general and the smaller literature on table manners in specific include argument after argument to the conclusion that social rules of this kind play a crucial role within human life and civilization, though there is disagreement about what exactly that role is. Several of the most prominent philosophers writing about manners in general hold either (a) that the existence of rules of manners and obeying rules of manners express moral virtues or (b) that manners are “part of the practice of morality itself.”¹⁹ Kass (1994) maintains that table manners in specific “express the humanity of the eaters” and allow people “to attain and manifest nobility.”²⁰ The upshot of all of these teleological claims is that rules of table manners, sometimes because of their distinctive role relating to eating and other times because of their status as a specific case of manners in general, have robust normative — often, it is said, specifically moral — force.²¹ And because the rules of table manners have a crucial,

19. Stohr (2012) holds both of these views, maintaining, in addition to what was quoted in the main text, that manners “enable us to express and act upon moral ideas like respect, self-respect, and consideration of others” (p. 166). Also see Johnson (1999) for a characterization of manners as “little virtues,” which are nonetheless “features of moral literacy” that express larger virtues of “equity and equitableness” that law cannot capture as well as manners can (pp. 201–217). Scruton (2012) also subscribes to a version of the expressive view on which virtues such as gentleness and decency are promoted by well-mannered behavior, and the kind of person that one is is expressed by that behavior (pp. 24–32).
20. Kass (1994), pp. 131, 158. His view, however, involves a much more complex understanding of the purpose of table manners. The purposes Kass mentions, though different in several important ways, all, in one way or another, involve expressions of humanity. Manners are thought to “validate and enhance the natural promise of the upright human form” (p. 141); “show consideration for the comfort and pleasure of one’s fellow diners,” “promote community,” “symbolically [represent] a group’s sensibilities and attitudes,” and “routinize what would otherwise be a matter for repeated conscious yet unguided decision” (p. 152). Also, manners “[make possible] the immediacy and intimacy of life” (p. 153) and “effect a certain beautification of the eater, as he displays himself to be above enslavement to his appetites” (p. 154). Table manners are how we express virtue and, according to Kass, “the first and cardinal virtue of the table is temperance or moderation” (p. 154). Also, nobility itself is understood in terms of humanity, as the “natural garb of the truly upright animal” (p. 158).
21. Kass (1994), pp. 132, 138.

normativity-generating function, whatever that function turns out to be, they are far from arbitrary.²² And all of this seems to be supported not only by several philosophical arguments but also by the fact that rules of table manners are found cross-culturally.²³

Assume that all of this is true. Rules of table manners are highly non-arbitrary. Cumulatively, they play a crucial role in human life and civilization. And they, therefore, have robust normative force. Does it follow that a purely descriptive account of table manners is impossible, or even that such an account is less plausible than it otherwise would be?

No. To see why, consider the following analogy with tables — not *rules* regarding how one behaves at tables but the *pieces of furniture* themselves: tables. Kass (1994) points out that tables serve several important functions in human society. One is that they provide a place where people come together socially. Occasionally, he says, humans “eat (or, more accurately, feed) side by side, as at a trough; in contrast, at table we all face not our food but one another. Thus we silently acknowledge our mutual commitment to share not only some food but also commensurate forms of commensal behavior.”²⁴ Tables are found cross-culturally, and their designs are far from arbitrary. But this social function is not essential to the concept *table*, since a small table designed to be used and eaten at by one person is still a table. Tables are undoubtedly artifacts of human creation, and a bare-bones metaphysical account of tables can set aside the roles that tables play in human life, focusing instead on the descriptive conditions for their existence. Analogously, not all rules of table manners play the vital role that such rules play in general, whatever that role is.²⁵ And the putative

22. Lewis (1969) famously advances a view of convention that captures a kind of arbitrariness. See Marmor (2009) for more explicit discussion of this as well as a more comprehensive account of convention. Also see Foot (1972), p. 309, and Marmor (2009), p. 141.
23. Kass (1994), pp. 131, 138–141.
24. Kass (1994), p. 135.
25. This may not be true of table etiquette. But it is true of table manners. See the

fact that these rules play this role does not demonstrate that (a) they are anything other than artifacts of human creation or (b) their existence cannot be accounted for in terms of descriptive states of affairs. This is not to say that there is no important philosophical work to be done investigating the role of table manners in general. (Indeed, Kass and the other philosophers already mentioned are doing that work.) It is only to say that that work does not directly rule out the possibility of success for another philosophical project: explaining the existence of table manners in descriptive terms.

Of course, tables are different from rules in one seemingly relevant respect: rules are, at least in the merely formal sense, normative. So we should consider an analogy between rules of table manners and not a type of furniture but another type of rule: rules of a game, such as basketball. One of the central functions of basketball, we might think, is to provide a space for people to physically but non-violently compete with one another. And because the game has this function, its rules, like the rules of table manners, are non-arbitrary. Certain forms of physical contact count as a “foul” to ensure non-violence, and the basket is placed at a height that makes scoring physically difficult but not impossible, etc. Moreover, the function and non-arbitrariness of the rules of basketball frequently give players robust reason to obey them. *Ceteris paribus*, insofar as one has reason to promote physical but non-violent competition, one has reason to obey some or all of the rules of basketball. But this kind of robust normativity, which attaches to rules of basketball partly as a result of their function, does not *always* attach to them.²⁶ Often, we have no reason at all to obey the rules. And

distinction with which this paper began.

26. I do not think that Kass necessarily disagrees. Before presenting a detailed discussion of the rules of table manners set out by Erasmus of Rotterdam in 1530, Kass (1994) says, “[w]hether at home or away, whether as a host or a guest, being at table and eating with others obliges proper conduct” (p. 138). This is plausibly true, but it is compatible with the claim that the rules of table manners do not *always* have robust normative force. This could be so either simply because the quoted sentence was only meant to apply most of the time or because “proper conduct” is not synonymous with table manners. Sometimes proper conduct demands obeying the rules of table manners, as

a purely descriptive account of basketball is plausible. There exists a rule of basketball prohibiting slapping an opposing player on the arm because some descriptive states of affairs — presumably involving how players behave and what other players, coaches, referees, and fans say and think about their behavior — obtain.

What does this show about an account of table manners? If we are interested in a wide-ranging, ambitious account of table manners, then it shows very little. Such an account, in addition to many other things, would still have to say what the central function of table manners is. But a less ambitious, purely metaphysical account need not do that. As I explain in the following section, I am engaged in the less ambitious project.

3. A Normative Attitude Theory

It is worth saying explicitly what *type* of account is presented in this section. Doing so helps to situate it within the rich but fairly narrow existing philosophical literature on manners. That literature consists almost entirely of works of moral philosophy.²⁷ In almost all of this literature, it is asked how human-created rules of manners relate to morality. Most prominently, the question is: What reason do we have to follow rules of manners?²⁸ By contrast, this paper is a work

we understand the term, but other times it may demand violating them, such as in the Queen Victoria example.

27. For a borderline exception to this, see Johnson (1998).

28. This can be seen both in the literature on manners in general and on table manners in specific. In the literature on manners generally, Johnson (1999) classifies manners as a “little virtue.” He considers Rawlsian and Aristotelian approaches to such minor virtues and argues that philosophical liberalism fails when applied to manners. Johnson’s ultimate view is that manners express the larger virtues of “equity and equitability.” Stohr (2012) focuses on the question “What is the point of etiquette and what reason, if any, do we have to follow its dictates?” Her book is an attempt to “establish and explain the moral value” of table manners (p. 166). Her view is that “polite behavior is an extension of morality into small corners of our lives,” and it “goes hand in hand with good moral character” (pp. 3, 4). Stohr admits that it is possible for manners to lose its connection with morality but insists that when it does so, it “los[es] its force” (p. 167). This puts us in agreement. The aim of the

of metaphysics. The question is: What are the conditions for the existence of rules of manners?

Of course, things are slightly more complicated than that. When it comes to table manners, the object of ontological interest is a system of *rules* and is therefore normative in some sense. So the normativity of table manners is relevant. But it is relevant only insofar as that normativity may constitute a constraint on the metaphysical account. In the end, I think, the normativity of table manners constitutes *some-what* of a constraint. The fact that the practice of table manners is not normative in the robust sense means that a metaphysical theory of table manners need not explain the existence of robust reasons for action. Therefore, it is possible to explain the practice of table manners by appeal exclusively to descriptive states of affairs. But the fact that the practice of table manners is normative in the formal sense means a theory of table manners must explain the existence of social rules. This is the constraint that even merely formal normativity places on a metaphysical account. Because of this constraint, purely behavioral theories and Humean belief-desire psychological theories are doomed. The descriptive conditions of an account of table manners need to make mention not just of behavior but also of psychological states. And those must be psychological states other than simply belief and desire.²⁹ The following account does just this.

present paper is to understand the conditions for the existence of these rules that have lost their force. Scruton (2012) is also focused on the practical — not the metaphysical — question. Scapp & Seitz (2007) edited a collected volume composed of works in the philosophy of etiquette or manners. Every entry in the volume is a work of moral philosophy. And, indeed, according to the editors, it is the “general assumption” shared by the various contributions that manners matter morally, or even that “manners are morals” (pp. 2, 3). Woods (2018) argues that etiquette bears a crucial structural similarity to morality and that we have reason to follow the rules of etiquette. For additional philosophical work on manners or etiquette that focuses on normative or practical questions rather than metaphysical ones, see Martin (1993), Kristjánsson (2013), Stohr (2016), Martin & Stent (1997), and Olberding (2016). As for table manners in particular, Kass (1994) is very clearly interested in the normative, teleological, and practical issues, rather than the metaphysical ones (p. 7).

29. This is because, as Lewis (1969) himself admits, belief and desire are not themselves sufficient for the existence of rules or norms.

In order for there to be a rule of table manners requiring table-behavior-type *b* in a society *s*, the following descriptive state of affairs must obtain: enough members of *s* take a special critical attitude toward instances of table behavior based on whether those instances of behavior are of type *b*.³⁰ This is — at least for rules of simple systems without established second-order rules — a necessary condition.³¹ It may not be sufficient. It may also be necessary that enough members of *s* have knowledge (though plausibly not common knowledge) that others have an attitude of this sort.³²

An account of table manners centered on a normative attitude in this way is akin to Hart's practice theory of social rules.³³ In fact, as elaborated below, the special critical attitude is Hart's famous *internal point of view*. As we will see, however, the Hartian account faces significant challenges (and is rejected by many in the contemporary philosophical literature). So defending such an account is a non-trivial intervention. Moreover, the account of table manners defended here differs from Hart's version in that (a) it is applied to table manners specifically, (b) it tentatively includes a knowledge condition, and (c) it jettisons Hart's requirement of a regularity of behavior — a condition that has been persuasively attacked.³⁴

30. This formulation includes both positive (e.g., thou shall consume soup silently) and negative (e.g., thou shalt not slurp soup) rules so long as behavior types can be formulated negatively. Fuller (1969) calls these disjuncts “requirements of forbearances” and “affirmative” demands (p. 42).

31. It is a necessary condition in societies where the systems of table manners are not so formal and well codified that there are authoritative (typically written-down) versions of table manners rules and authoritative table manners officials who, by way of division of social labor, can determine that there is a rule of table manners even when very few members of the society are aware of it.

32. See Southwood & Eriksson (2011) and Brennan et al. (2013).

33. Hart (1961) and Raz (1982). Something like this view as applied to language is espoused by many, including Brandom (1994), who calls it “phenomenalism,” and Lance & O'Leary-Hawthorne (1997), p. 62.

34. See the “Moldovians” example in Southwood & Eriksson (2011), p. 204, and Brennan et al. (2013), p. 20. The three differences listed in the main text here might be thought to be relatively insignificant. I think that is correct. The

What is this “special critical attitude”?³⁵ In brief, to take the requisite critical attitude toward some type of behavior is to evaluate particular instances of behavior — regarding them, for example, as appropriate/inappropriate or proper/improper — based on whether those instances conform to a pattern. Since there are many ways to evaluate instances of behavior, there are many ways to take this attitude. One way is to regard some behavior as immoral because it deviates from a pattern that one takes to be a moral rule. However, one could also regard some behavior as impolite or simply incorrect because it deviates from a pattern that one takes to be a rule of table manners. To take the critical attitude is to use a pattern of behavior or possible pattern of behavior as an evaluative standard that is applied to instances of behavior.

Crucially, even though the attitude is normative, *the fact that people take the attitude* is a descriptive state of affairs. So explaining the existence of the normative practice of table manners in terms of people taking this attitude is a way of explaining a normative practice in terms of descriptive states of affairs.

As mentioned, some kind of knowledge condition may also be necessary for the existence of a rule of table manners. If — as Geoffrey Brennan, Lina Eriksson, Robert E. Goodin, and Nicholas Southwood argue — this is the case, then the normative practice of table manners is still explained in terms of descriptive states of affairs.³⁶

Though I find it plausible that some kind of knowledge condition is required, my focus here is on the normative attitude condition because it is more puzzling and philosophically interesting and also because it is the main target of two serious objections.³⁷ The remainder

original contribution of this half of the paper consists not so much in the theory itself but in the defense of the theory that follows.

35. The final section of the paper aims to say what the attitude is and how it can explain the existence of the rules of table manners.

36. Brennan et al. (2013), pp. 30–31.

37. It was suggested at the outset, and at the beginning of this section, that this is a “partial” account. It is partial both in the sense that I am more-or-less neutral

of this paper focuses on this attitude. In the following section, I contend with the claim that accounts based on this attitude are subject to a decisive counterexample. I argue that it is no counterexample at all. Then, in section 5, I consider and respond to the argument that an account based on this attitude is viciously circular.³⁸

4. First Objection: A Putative Counterexample

Here is the putative counterexample. When I was eight or nine, my family went to a middle-class Jewish vacation resort in the Catskill Mountains. The included dinner was “all you can eat.” I remember hearing my grandfather say, “Don’t fill up on bread.” For the sake of example, let’s say that all members of my family (or society, if we prefer a larger group) eat only a little bread at the beginning of an all-you-can-eat meal. And they take the required critical attitude — positively evaluating those who eat little bread and negatively evaluating those who eat too much bread. Say as well that every member of my family knows that the others take this attitude. The conditions of the theory are met. So there should be a rule against filling up on bread. But unlike, say, the rule against slurping soup, there simply is no rule against filling up on bread. So the attitude-based account fails.

This type of counterexample comes originally from G.J. Warnock and is taken up by Joseph Raz.³⁹ It is then, I think, refuted — successfully and separately — by Matthew H. Kramer and Leslie Green.⁴⁰ But this response seems to have been insufficiently appreciated, as

on the necessity of the knowledge condition and also in the sense that there may be other conditions required in order to distinguish rules of table manners from other similar social rules, such as rules of the proper way to set a table (as opposed to eat at it), rules of fashion, etc.

38. If successful, both this discussion and the response to the putative counterexample are helpful to the Brennan et al. (2013) account.

39. Warnock (1971), pp. 45–46, 61–65, and Raz (1975), p. 50.

40. Kramer (1999), pp. 251–253, and Green (1999).

many — Andrei Marmor, Scott Shapiro, and others — continue to use Warnock's counterexample more-or-less unchanged.⁴¹

The general direction of Kramer's and Green's responses can be put as follows. Despite appearances, there is no counterexample here because there *is* a rule prohibiting filling up on bread. It is easy to miss this rule because it is not a rule of table manners. Instead, it is a rule of *my family's dinner strategy*. My family's dinner strategy and table manners are both practices consisting of artificial rules. But they are importantly different. My family's dinner strategy is a practice consisting of rules prescribing how one ought to behave to maximize one's enjoyment of dinner. These rules are the product of the attitudes of my family members — our shared opinion of what dinner behavior is strategically best. And while the rules of table manners are rarely written down, the rules of my family's dinner strategy, by contrast, are *never* written down.⁴² But since both are genuine social rules, getting the result that a rule against filling up on bread exists is a *virtue* of the Hartian attitude-based account.

Why has this rejection of Warnock's counterexample gone unappreciated? Perhaps because, even if a rule against slurping soup and a rule against filling up on bread are both rules, they seem to be rules of *very different types*. Explaining the nature of the difference will go some way to explaining why so many theorists have failed to notice that the rule of my family's dinner strategy is a rule at all.

We can extract just such an explanation from John Rawls's distinction between "summary" and "practice" rules.⁴³ For our pur-

41. Marmor (2001), p. 3, and (2009), pp. 14–15, Shapiro (2011), pp. 103–104, and Wodak (2016), p. 49. Marmor (2009) presents a slightly more developed version of this attack, but it is directed (correctly) not at Hart's practice theory but at the claim that a generally recognized reason alone is a rule. See also Perry (2015).

42. The exception being right now, in this paper.

43. Rawls (1955). Those familiar with Rawls's paper will recall that in the early and middle parts of the paper, Rawls discusses the distinction as one between two conceptions of rules. But he admits toward the end that it is misleading to think of these as competing conceptions and that it is better to think of them simply as two different kinds of rules.

poses, though, it is best to ignore practice rules and focus on a distinction between *summary* and *non-summary* rules. Summary rules, Rawls says, are "reports that cases of a certain sort have been found on other grounds to be properly decided in a certain way."⁴⁴ These human-created rules attempt to "summarize" the considerations that bear on one's action independent of the existence of the rule. Many strategic considerations bear on the amount of bread that one should eat at the beginning of an all-you-can-eat meal. Members of my family are (or take themselves to be) attuned to these considerations. They regard bread-filling-up behavior as unwise.⁴⁵ According to the theory that I am defending, this is sufficient for the existence of a rule prohibiting filling up on bread. And this rule is a summary rule. It is a synopsis or "report," as Rawls might say, of my family's opinion about what prudential/strategic considerations already bear on bread eating. Other examples of summary rules include widely accepted rules for how much people should exercise in order to stay healthy, traditional strategic rules for winning games, and rules of the conventional morality of a given society. Just as rules of all these types exist even if they fail to accurately capture the independent considerations that they attempt to summarize, so too the rule of my family's dinner strategy exists even if my family's opinion is mistaken — that is, even if filling up on bread is actually wise.

What makes non-summary rules, such as the rules of table manners, different is that they do not summarize independent considerations. The rule against slurping soup is not a report on how, even absent such a rule, one ought to eat soup. A summary rule, like a book report or any other kind of summary, can be inaccurate. But a non-summary rule cannot. If a society has a rule of table manners *requiring* soup slurping, that is not some kind of mistake. Other examples of non-summary social rules include rules of games, rules of fashion, condominium by-laws, and university regulations. These are all

44. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

45. They are also aware that this attitude is shared by other members of my family.

human-created rules that constitute normative practices without summarizing other rules or considerations.

Another respect in which summary and non-summary rules differ — though not, I believe, one that should incline us to say that the former are not rules — is how they are used to explain behavior.⁴⁶ To the question “Why did you not slurp your soup?” one can appropriately answer by citing a non-summary rule: “Because slurping soup is prohibited by a rule of table manners.” But to the question “Why did you not fill up on bread?” it is perhaps *less* appropriate to answer by citing a summary rule: “Because filling up on bread is prohibited by a rule of my family’s dinner strategy.” Rather, it is more natural or appropriate when offering such an explanation to bypass the summary rule altogether and directly cite the considerations that the rule summarizes, saying something like “Because filling up on bread would have prevented me from enjoying the more desirable main course.” It seems to me that this is a genuine difference between summary and non-summary rules. But summary rules should still be considered rules.⁴⁷ There are two simple reasons for this. First, they exhibit the characteristic feature of rules: they entail the application of evaluative or deontic concepts. A member of my family who fills up on bread has done something *incorrect* or *inappropriate* or *impermissible* by the standards of my family’s dinner strategy. Second, calling summary rules “rules” fits, at least to a significant degree, with ordinary language. If I fill up on bread, even when doing so is wise, I can be said to have “violated a rule of my family’s accepted dinner strategy.” Since summary rules are rules, my family’s strategy for eating an all-you-can-eat meal is not a counterexample to the Hartian account of table manners.⁴⁸

46. See Warnock (1971) and Marmor (2009).

47. It should also be emphasized that summary rules are more than just generally accepted reasons. It may be generally accepted that one should not fill up on bread, but this does not constitute a social rule for a group of people unless enough of those people actually refrain from filling up on bread. And even when such a rule is in place, it is distinct from other, non-summary rules in all the ways discussed above.

48. Three objections to this are worth mentioning. First, will allowing summary

But if there is a rule prohibiting eating too much bread, and if there is such an important difference between it and the rules of table manners, then the question becomes: What makes this rule a rule of my family’s dinner strategy and not a rule of table manners? This question is, at least partially, answered in the following section.

5. Second Objection: We Cannot Make Sense of the Critical Attitude

This account faces a second possible objection — one that only reveals itself after we have made the robust/formal distinction from section 1. Broadly, the objection is that there is no coherent way of making sense of the evaluative attitude at the heart of the account. So responding to this objection also presents an occasion to further clarify what this attitude is.

To take the critical attitude toward a pattern of behavior, and thereby transform that pattern into a rule, one evaluates instances of behavior in virtue of their accordance or discordance with the pattern. For

rules result in far more rules than there are: rules against clipping one’s nails with Russian-manufactured chainsaws and against dipping credit cards in hydrochloric acid? (Thanks to Scott Shapiro for putting this question to me.) It will not, but seeing this requires discussion of the details of Hart’s internal point of view that takes us beyond the scope of this paper. In short, taking the internal point of view — the critical attitude that generates rules of table manners — involves a mental representation of the pattern of behavior against which instances of behavior are evaluated. So there is a rule prohibiting filling up on bread because my family members have, at some level, a representation of the behavior type *filling up on bread*. But there is no rule prohibiting dipping credit cards in hydrochloric acid because no one has that description of behavior in mind. Second, does Hart’s theory get the mistaken result that the rule of my family’s dinner strategy is the same type of rule as the rule of table manners? The theory gets the result that both are social rules, but this does not entail that there are no further distinctions to be drawn within that type. Indeed, the summary/non-summary distinction is one. Third, if Warnock’s counterexample is misguided, then why has it been so widely (with the exception of Kramer and Green) accepted for nearly fifty years? I suspect that the answer has to do with the unspokenness and nebulousness of systems of summary rules like my family’s dinner strategy. Since table manners are so much more codified and therefore so much more salient, it is not surprising that they overshadow less salient rules when the two are juxtaposed. My thought, though it is speculation, is that the juxtaposition obscures our vision and makes the putative counterexample appealing.

instance, because we recognize soup slurping to be in discord with the pattern of silent soup consumption, we regard instances of soup slurping as not just *uncommon* but *inappropriate* or *impermissible*. That is the critical attitude.

But now that we have made the distinction between two ways in which a practice might be normative, we can ask the following question about this attitude: When those who take this attitude regard instances of behavior as *appropriate* or *inappropriate*, do they take this evaluation to be robust or merely formal?⁴⁹ When participants regard soup slurping as *indecorous*, do they necessarily take there to be robust reason not to slurp soup, or do they merely take soup slurping to be a violation of a rule of table manners?

The problem is that either answer seems to lead to difficulty. If we say that participants take the rules of table manners to have robust normative force, then we are committed to an error theory, at least for those rules of table manners that lack robust normative force. On such a view, the rules of table manners are like the rules of a false conventional morality. A code of conventional morality is, at least in part, constituted by members of that society taking there to be robust reasons for action. And a false conventional morality results from members of a society taking there to be such objects when no such objects exist — for example, taking there to be a moral rule against sodomy when, let us assume, there is no such rule. An error theory of such a practice of conventional morality is plausible precisely because the practice is erroneous. But the practice of table manners is not erroneous — it is not a mass delusion in the way that a false practice of conventional morality is — so any theory that makes it out to be is false.

Alternatively, if participants take the artificial rules of table manners to merely be rules without robust normative force, then there

49. Regarding language, Lance & O’Leary-Hawthorne (1997) are forced into the former position — that linguistic normativity arises from taking there to be some kind of robust normativity — because they do not seem to consider the possibility of a practice being normative in my artificial sense; see pp. 175–176. Moreover, Raz (1979) might also have this view about legal normativity, although it is hard to say; see p. 154.

appears to be a circularity problem. We are assessing an account of what it is for there to be human-created social rules of table manners. However, the crucial condition in the account makes mention of an attitude, and this way of specifying what that attitude is makes mention of the very thing that we set out to explain: human-created social rules of table manners. If this is how we understand the attitude, then we have answered the question “What is it for there to be a rule of table manners prohibiting ϕ -ing?” with “It is for enough people to take instances of ϕ -ing to violate a rule of table manners.” It is not immediately clear whether this circularity is vicious, but it is certainly striking.

The first thing to say in response to this apparent difficulty is that most participants in a practice like table manners do not operate with the robust/formal distinction. This even applies to those professional philosophers who regularly appeal to the robust/formal distinction in their academic lives but (reasonably) set it aside when they sit down for dinner. We simply evaluate behavior, regarding it, for instance, as *polite* or *impolite*, with no particular determination of whether that behavior is favored or disfavored by robustly normative considerations or whether it merely violates a rule.

This response might seem immediately incoherent. Participants in practices like table manners are applying a rule. They take slurping soup to be a violation of a rule. But I have claimed that, most of the time, they do not consider this rule to be robustly normative and they do not consider it to be formally normative. So what kind of rule do they take the soup slurping to be a violation of? It seems that they must take soup slurping to violate a rule that is neither robust nor merely formal. But this, we might think, is incoherent.

To clear up this apparent problem, an analogy is helpful. All beers fall into one of two categories, depending on which type of yeast is used in fermentation: lagers and ales. A beer drinker who is not aware of the distinction might look at a beverage and think, “that’s beer.” Does she take the beverage to be lager or ale? Neither. She just takes it to be beer. But still, there is no third type of beer — generic beer, which is neither lager nor ale — of which she takes this particular beer to be

an instance. Generic beer does not exist. All beer is either lager or ale. Yet this does not imply that when someone takes something to be beer, she must take it to be lager or ale. Someone's beer concepts may be coarse grained, and it is a mistake to impose more detail and sophistication onto her thought than it really has. This is how we should understand the paradigm case of taking the critical attitude. We simply take it that soup slurping is incorrect without that judgment or attitude including further content as to whether soup slurping is robustly incorrect or rule-violatingly incorrect.⁵⁰

The beer analogy is imperfect. In most cases, table manners participants do not make the robust/formal distinction, but when pressed, they may admit that rules of table manners do not intrinsically have moral, prudential, or some other kind of robust normative force. And once they do this, it should still be possible for such individuals to have a practice of table manners. But if that is the case — if participants can create a rule of table manners by taking there to be a rule of table manners — we have arrived back at the circularity problem.

The problem, once again, is that in our account of what it is for there to be a social rule, we appeal to the fact that people take there to be a social rule. This kind of circularity has appeared in many areas of philosophy and much ink has been spilled attempting to say whether it is vicious.⁵¹ Instead of cursory discussions of a wide range of cases, I engage in a single, but still cursory, discussion of a nearby case. Allan

50. I should add that the coherence of this option shows that the robust/formal distinction is not a semantic one. It is not a distinction between different meanings of the word "rule" or "normative." Of course, once we have made the distinction we can ask of any rule whether it is robust or merely formal. But we cannot always ask of any use of the word "rule" whether it is meant in the robust or merely formal sense. Similarly, lager and ale are not two meanings of "beer." Someone ignorant of the lager/ale distinction can still meaningfully use the word "beer," and we cannot demand to know of such a use whether "beer" was meant in the lager or ale sense.

51. This issue is seen in discussion of representational theories of consciousness and in discussion of fitting attitude theories of value. For a start, see Anscombe (1965), Wiggins (1987), Gibbard (1990), and Crane (2003). For a good argument against the viciousness of such circularities, see Levine (2003).

Gibbard faces a parallel circularity problem.⁵² According to Gibbard, *R* being a reason to do *X* is accounted for by appeal to *R* being taken to weigh in favor of doing *X*.⁵³ But T. M. Scanlon points out the circularity:

This analysis does not avoid reliance on the idea of being a reason, or "counting in favor of," since that very notion, in the form of "weighing in favor of," appears in the characterization of the attitude he describes.⁵⁴

Gibbard's response is to escape the circularity by further reducing the attitude. Taking *R* to weigh in favor of doing *X* is explained computationally or, we might say, dispositionally. This state of mind just is "calculating what to do on a certain pattern, a pattern we could program a robot to mimic."⁵⁵ Gibbard uses "mimic" only because the robot would calculate differently than we would. But he is clear, as he must be if he is to adequately respond to Scanlon in this way, that the robot does literally weigh considerations.

The drawback of Gibbard's approach is that he has to make good on the proposed computational reduction of the attitude. Can he successfully reduce this attitude to some computational facts? Gibbard does not offer a suggestion for how this reduction goes or an argument that it is possible. Whether he *needs* such an argument depends on what kind of attitude is supposed to be reducible to computational facts. There are two ways to think about this attitude of taking some consideration to weigh in favor of doing something. The phrase used to pick out the attitude in question — "taking *R* to weigh in favor of doing *X*" — is either (a) part of folk psychology or natural language and picks out a commonplace mental state, such as belief, desire, anger, love, etc., or (b) the phrase is a technical or theoretical term, which has its extension determined by the role that it plays in Gibbard's theory.

52. Gibbard (1990) and (2003), pp. 188–191.

53. This formulation of Gibbard's view is presented by Scanlon (1998), pp. 58–59.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

55. Gibbard (2003), p. 190.

Either way, I think, will not do. If this attitude is part of ordinary folk psychology, then Gibbard is making a very contentious claim for which he presents no argument. The view that ordinary mental states can be reduced to computational or dispositional facts has been around in philosophy of mind for some time. But it is highly contentious. I would suggest that most philosophers of mind deny that simple robots *literally* have commonplace folk psychological mental states such as belief and desire. Gibbard does not present an argument that such reduction is possible because, I suspect, he uses the phrase “taking *R* to weigh in favor of doing *X*” not to pick out some ordinary folk psychological mental state with which we are already familiar. Rather, he may be using the phrase as a technical, theoretical term. Terms like “electron” or “Jack the Ripper” refer to whatever thing or things happen to meet enough of the descriptions contained in the theory of which those terms are a part. The label “Jack the Ripper” is introduced as part of a detective’s theory that several murders were committed by the same individual. Whoever committed the murders is the referent of “Jack the Ripper.” If Gibbard is using the phrase “taking *R* to weigh in favor of doing *X*” as a theoretical term, then no argument for reducing ordinary mental states to computational states may be needed. Gibbard is only committed to the computational reducibility of whatever state meets the descriptions that are part of Gibbard’s theory. The attitude of “taking *R* to weigh in favor of doing *X*” is just whatever attitude (a) is partly constitutive of *R* being a reason to do *X* and (b) is computationally reducible. No argument for reducibility is needed because it is a matter of stipulation. But in this case, Gibbard’s account seems to have lost its explanatory force and intuitive plausibility. The account comes to the claim that having reason to do something consists in an unspecified computational fact about people’s brains. Though we no longer need an argument that the relevant mental state is computational, we now need an argument for the view itself.

This is less discussion than Gibbard’s account warrants. But to give it the treatment it deserves would take us far afield. We need only cast enough doubt on Gibbard’s approach to warrant considering an

alternative solution to circularity problems of this sort.⁵⁶ The circularity arises because the notion to be explained — *reason*, in Gibbard’s case, or *rule*, in ours — is accounted for by appeal to an attitude in the content of which appears that very notion. Gibbard attempts to escape the circularity by analyzing away the attitude. By contrast, I embrace the circularity and argue that it is not vicious.

There are vicious circularities. An account of causation in terms of “one event making another event occur” is viciously circular. It gives us no insight because *making* an event occur just is *causing* it to occur. But other circular accounts seem to do just fine in spite of their circularity. Consider the following account of tables: to be a table is to be a collection of tiny (so tiny as to be invisible) and spacious (that is, consisting almost exclusively of empty space) molecules arranged table-wise. For our purposes it does not matter whether this is the correct account of what it is to be a table. What matters is just that the account makes use of the concept *table*, but it is far from trivial or uninformative. It is highly unlikely that someone lacking modern scientific training or equipment would stumble on the conclusion that tables are mostly empty space. So whether or not this account is correct, it is substantive. Of course, this account is useless if our aim is to give the concept *table* to someone who does not already have it. But those with the concept *table* learn something when they are taught such a theory.⁵⁷ Just as this theory is circular but informative, so too our theory of table manners is circular but informative. Artificial rules are explained in terms of people’s behavior and attitudes. If correct, this is substantive and informative, though perhaps not as bold as the above theory of tables. Yet when specifying which attitude people must have, like

56. I suspect that McDowell (1985) would endorse an answer like the one I present in response to a similar circularity worry for his view of secondary qualities and of value. Unfortunately, McDowell only mentions the worry in a footnote and does not spell out a response.

57. If the theory is true, of course.

when specifying which arrangement the table-composing molecules must be in, we appeal to the very thing the account is an account of.⁵⁸

Even if we agree that the table-wise-molecules account is not viciously circular, and even if we agree that the account of table manners is similar, it would still be nice to say *why* these circularities are not vicious. What is the difference between these non-vicious circularities and the vicious ones? Here is a proposal (one simple enough to border on stipulation): the circularity of an account is vicious if it prevents that account from fulfilling its purpose. There are, it seems to me, at least three purposes that accounts might have and so at least three types of accounts. Some accounts are mere definitions. The purpose of these accounts, if they can even be called “accounts,” is to give those who already possess a concept a new *term* for that concept. Even the above account of causation is not viciously circular when considered as a definition. If our aim is to explain the term “cause” to someone who already possesses the concept *cause* but only has terms like “make,” then the circularity is no problem.

But this kind of definitional account is less interesting than what we might call a “reductive” account.⁵⁹ On one way of thinking about reduction, reduction is possible when two propositions pick out the very same state of affairs. The same state of affairs can be described as including lightning or electric discharge. If one did not already know

58. There is a disanalogy between the analysis of tables in terms of particles arranged table-wise and the analysis of artificial rules in terms of people taking there to be artificial rules. In principle, it is possible to remove the mention of tables from the account of tables by characterizing what table-wise arrangement is — for example, with legs and a flat surface. It is less clear whether this can be done for the account of artificial rules. This disanalogy, however, is irrelevant. The question is whether the circularity of the account makes it uninformative or otherwise useless. If an account is uninformative, then this would be so even if it could be changed so as to become informative. But, as it turns out, the circular account of tables is informative. It is irrelevant that it could be made even more informative.

59. I use the term more loosely than Ernest Nagel and other mid-twentieth-century philosophers of science, who were interested in theory reduction. See Nagel (1961). For alternative versions of reduction, see Hooker (1981), Schaffner (1993), and Weber (2004).

that these different descriptions pick out the very same phenomenon, then the account is informative. In some reductive accounts, the two descriptions are *very* different. There may be no conceptual overlap between them whatsoever. This seems to be the case when lightning is accounted for as electric discharge. Of course, not all electric discharge is lightning. So we may wish to say *which* electric discharge counts as lightning. If fulminology (the study of lightning) is sufficiently advanced, then fulminologists can specify the type of electric discharge without mentioning “lightning.” But if it is not, if all that can be done is to say that lightning is the kind of electric discharge that constitutes lightning, then the account does not become vacuous. It is still informative to say that lightning is electric discharge, even if we are unable to specify which type of electric discharge without use of the concept *lightning*. What this circular account will not be able to do is give the concept *lightning* to someone who does not already have it.⁶⁰

There are at least two kinds of reductive accounts: those that inform or explain the nature of some phenomenon and those that give a concept to those who do not already possess it. Many accounts serve both purposes and therefore are of both types. If an account is meant only to explain some phenomenon, then it is enough to inform us that that phenomenon is identical to one described in another way, even if that description also contains some of the concepts contained in the initial description. Of course, if the two descriptions turn out themselves to be relevantly the same, then the account fails even at this task. But that does not seem to be the case for the reduction of tables to molecules arranged table-wise, the reduction of lightning to electric discharge, or the reduction of artificial rules to behavior and (in some cases) taking there to be artificial rules.⁶¹ This is not to suggest that

60. See McDowell (1985).

61. This is not to say that there are no disanalogies among these three accounts. What matters is the point of similarity: as the theories are stated here, there is conceptual overlap between the initial description of the phenomenon and the description given by the account. The point is just that such accounts can be enormously significant and informative as to the nature of the phenomenon described.

circularity is a virtue. Any amount of circularity reduces the degree to which an account is informative. The account of tables in terms of tiny and spacious molecules arranged table-wise is informative. It would be even more informative if the arrangement of those molecules were characterized without use of the concept *table*. Similarly, the account of social or artificial rules in terms of people taking there to be social or artificial rules would be more informative were it not circular. But since the accounts are still informative, and since their purpose can be seen as illuminating the nature of their target phenomena and not as providing concepts to those who do not already have them, the circularity is not vicious. When philosophers call a circularity “vicious,” we mean more than just *this account is informative, but it could be more informative*. These accounts’ circularities are vicious when the accounts are considered as attempts to give their target concepts to those who do not already possess them. But for mere attempts to informatively explain that two states of affairs are one and the same, this kind of circularity is not fatal.⁶²

Of course, to say that we can give a theory of table manners that is in some sense reductive is not to say that such a theory can be given for other normative domains, like law or language or morality. Obviously, there has been resistance to such theories. As John McDowell put it:

By Wittgenstein’s lights, it is a mistake to think we can dig down to a level at which we no longer have application for normative notions (like “following according to the rule”).⁶³

62. This could all be put more ecumenically, allowing for disagreement about what constitutes reduction. Either the account that I am offering is reductive but is put to a purpose such that circularity is not vicious, or it is non-reductive, making circularity not an issue but still illuminating.

63. M cDowell (1985), p. 341.

At least in regard to table manners, I think we can dig down to a level at which all the phenomena are non-normative. But I allow that it may only be possible for us to describe this level using normative terms.⁶⁴

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64. The most significant thanks for this paper should go to three people: Hannah Ginsborg, Niko Kolodny, and John MacFarlane.

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