

Social Order Without a Moral Lawgiver — 43

Cooperation, Normativity, and the Non-Sequitur from Discomfort to Necessity

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Revised August 2026

Central claim

Arguments that move from moral seriousness, objective moral truth, or the need for social order to a personal divine lawgiver skip distinct steps: discomfort must track reality; the lawgiver account must outperform ordinary social mechanisms; objective obligation must require personal command; and a claimed divine source must be reliably accessible. Ordinary mechanisms make variable cooperation intelligible, and objectivity does not by itself entail command, so these starting points establish none of those bridges. This does not disprove theism, moral realism, or divine grounding, which remain open to independent evidence.

Preview:

Target shortcuts

Bridges required

Live comparator

Bounded result

Moral seriousness, objectivity, or social order is said to require a personal divine lawgiver.

Discomfort must track reality; the lawgiver account must outperform ordinary mechanisms; objectivity must require command; claimed commands must be reliably accessible.

Shared vulnerability, reciprocity, reputation, norm psychology, and institutions explain cooperation, conflict, criticism, and repair.

Social order does not favor a lawgiver by itself; objectivity does not entail one; a claimed source does not supply access. Theism remains open.

The argument tests an inferential shortcut. It does not claim that every social norm is justified, that evolved agreement creates moral truth, or that theism has been disproved.

Visual preview:

Order Without a Lawgiver: The Logic of Secular Morality

The Logical Gap

Deconstructing the Lawgiver Argument



Discomfort is Not Demonstration

Emotional aversion to a godless universe does not make a divine lawgiver logically necessary.



The "Non-Sequitur" of Command

Even if objective moral facts exist, they do not automatically require a personal commander.



The Access Burden

Diverse religious disagreements prove that claiming a divine source does not provide moral clarity.

The Three Logical Substitutions

The Intuition	The Substitution (The Leap)	The Flaw
Morality is Serious 	Must be Metaphysically Objective	Seriousness is a human value, not a cosmic fact.
Morality is Objective 	Must be Commanded	Logic and math are objective without being commands.
Morality is Commanded 	Must be a Specific Deity	A command does not identify a specific religious tradition.

The Natural Foundation

How Social Order Actually Works

Grounded in Shared Vulnerability

Norms against harm are intelligible because humans are bodies that can be injured.



Evolution of Prosociality



Kinship, reciprocity, and empathy provide natural reasons for cooperation without divine statutes.

Morality as a Public Achievement

Laws and customs are successful human tools for coordinating life and protecting the vulnerable.



The visual contrasts three leaps in the lawgiver inference with natural and institutional supports of social order. Its word prove has a limited meaning: religious disagreement shows that merely claiming a divine source does not by itself deliver public moral clarity. The image does not decide whether objective moral truth or a divine ground exists.

Abstract

Social order does not by itself favor a personal divine moral lawgiver, and objective moral truth does not entail one. Arguments to the contrary often move among five distinct questions: why morality feels serious, how cooperation arises, whether objective moral truths exist, whether such truths require a commander, and how a claimed command could be reliably identified. This paper separates those questions, compares the divine-lawgiver hypothesis with an ordinary social-mechanism account, and evaluates the further bridges from objectivity to command and from divine source to public access. Evidence concerning reciprocity, reputation, punishment, shared intentionality, social expectations, and institutional self-governance makes the observed mixture of cooperation, conflict, norm stability, and norm change substantially expected without cosmic legislation. Social order therefore supplies no distinctive support for a lawgiver unless the lawgiver account predicts some further difference that the comparator does not. Objective truth, if granted, still requires an independently defended commander premise, while a claimed divine source yields no public advantage without reliable access to its requirements. The conclusion is limited: these arguments do not disprove theism, moral realism, a necessarily good deity, or every divine-command theory. They reject a shortcut, not every destination: each transition from seriousness to necessity, function to ontology, objectivity to command, and source to access requires its own evidence.

Keywords: moral lawgiver; social order; cooperation; social norms; moral realism; divine command theory; secular ethics; moral epistemology

1. The Inference Under Pressure

Moral-lawgiver arguments often begin from a genuine human concern. Cruelty should not become acceptable when it benefits the powerful. Betrayal should not become harmless when it goes unpunished. Moral criticism should be more than a noise one group makes at another. These concerns explain the emotional force of the argument, but they do not establish its conclusion.

The target is a family of inferences from moral seriousness, moral objectivity, or social necessity to a personal divine lawgiver. A *God-concept* is a specified conception of a deity, including the attributes, intentions, commands, and means of disclosure assigned to it. The lawgiver God-concept examined here is personal, authoritative, morally perfect, and able to issue requirements that bind human beings. The question is not whether such a conception is meaningful or even possible. The question is whether the ordinary facts of moral concern and social order identify it as necessary or comparatively better supported.

One may believe that without a divine foundation morality would lose its authority or society would collapse into predation. Abandoning theism does not follow. The narrower demand is to separate the questions before treating one answer as evidence for another. A person can grant that moral life is serious while disputing robust moral realism. A person can affirm objective moral truth while denying that truth must be commanded. A person can explain cooperation without claiming that cooperation makes every prevailing norm correct.

Table 1 makes those separations explicit. Each row names a real question, but no row supplies the next answer merely by being important.

These separations produce the governing thesis: discomfort is not demonstration; social function is not moral ontology; objectivity is not command; and a claimed source is not reliable access. Ordinary mechanisms already make variable cooperation intelligible, so social order is not distinctive evidence for a lawgiver. A lawgiver account may still succeed, but only by earning each bridge rather than treating the unattractiveness of a rival as proof of necessity.

2. Discomfort Is Not Demonstration

The word *absurd* conceals several different objections. A world without cosmic moral facts might be emotionally unbearable, practically dangerous, or logically incoherent. The first concerns what people can tolerate. The

Question	What it asks	What could answer it	What it does not settle
Moral seriousness	Why do some harms demand protest and protection?	Facts about suffering, agency, vulnerability, reasons, and value	Whether value is stance-independent or divinely grounded
Social order	How do groups sustain trust, restraint, and cooperation?	Reciprocity, reputation, sanctions, norms, law, and institutions	Whether successful norms are objectively true
Moral objectivity	Are any moral claims true independently of endorsement?	A realist metaethics and moral epistemology	Whether objective truths are commands
Divine lawgiving	Do obligations depend on a personal deity's authority?	A defended divine-command or divine-nature theory	Whether people can reliably identify the requirements

Table 1: Four questions that the lawgiver inference must connect rather than conflate. The table does not answer moral ontology; it shows where independent bridge arguments are required.

second concerns how people will behave. Only the third would establish impossibility. Treating the three as interchangeable turns a psychological datum into a metaphysical proof.

Deep desires are not trivial. The desire that victims receive justice, that love outlast death, or that cruelty matter to reality itself can reveal what human beings prize. But desire is not a truth-maker. A universe can frustrate a profound longing without contradicting itself. If the argument is that non-theistic morality feels inadequate, then the conclusion is autobiographical: the account does not satisfy a need. If the argument is that non-theistic morality cannot support cooperation, then the claim is empirical. If the argument is that objective obligation requires a personal source, then a philosophical bridge is needed. None of these burdens is discharged by the intensity of the initial reaction.

The same point applies to fear. People reasonably fear that moral skepticism could weaken restraint or empower domination. Yet a feared consequence does not show that the underlying belief is false. Nor does it show that the proposed cure works. A divine-lawgiver account would still have to explain why its authority is non-arbitrary, how its requirements are known, and whether it predicts the actual pattern of cooperation and conflict better than ordinary social mechanisms do.

The first bridge

If a conclusion is defended because its denial would feel intolerable, the argument has established the importance of the desire, not the existence of the desired object. To reach a lawgiver, the advocate must add premises about truth, necessity, and personal authority.

This is not a counsel of indifference. People can oppose torture, exploitation, and betrayal because of what these acts do to conscious, vulnerable agents and to the conditions of shared life. The practical demand to protect persons can remain urgent while disputes about moral ontology continue. Moral action has rarely waited for a final settlement of metaethics.

3. How Social Order Can Arise Without Cosmic Legislation

This section addresses one route to the lawgiver conclusion: the claim that social order would be impossible or inexplicable without cosmic legislation. It does not ask whether social mechanisms make any norm objectively true. It asks whether ordinary capacities and institutions make cooperation, restraint, criticism, and repair intelligible under the live comparator.

Social order does not require saints. It requires enough recurring structure that cooperation can be rewarded, defection can carry costs, expectations can become mutually visible, and institutions can reduce the burden placed on individual goodwill. Several partly independent mechanisms contribute to that structure.

3.1 Shared vulnerability and joint activity

Human beings can be injured, deceived, abandoned, supported, educated, and reconciled. These are not moral particles; they are features of the agents whose lives norms regulate. Shared vulnerability supplies common problems, while joint activity supplies reasons to coordinate. Tomasello's account traces important aspects of human morality to cooperation and shared intentionality: agents learn to form joint goals, recognize partners, and hold one another to expectations generated within collaborative activity (Tomasello, 2016). The account does not prove that every expectation is objectively correct. It explains why norm-governed social life is not mysterious in a non-lawgiver world.

3.2 Reciprocity, reputation, and assortment

Cooperation is vulnerable to free riding, but it is not mechanism-free. Reviews of human cooperation identify direct reciprocity, indirect reciprocity, kin selection, spatial structure, and multilevel processes as routes by which cooperative behavior can arise or persist (Rand & Nowak, 2013). Bowles and Gintis integrate experimental, ethnographic, archaeological, and modeling work into an account in which genetic evolution, cultural transmission, social motivations, and institutions interact (Bowles & Gintis, 2011). These mechanisms do not make humans uniformly generous. Their point is conditional: when repeated interaction, reputation, group structure, or aligned incentives change, cooperative behavior should change as well.

That conditional variability is an explanatory advantage. Humans cooperate and exploit, share and hoard, forgive and punish. A theory built from mixed motives and social conditions predicts no automatic harmony. It predicts that the same agents may behave differently when anonymity, future interaction, enforcement, group identity, or institutional trust changes.

3.3 Norm expectations and enforcement

Social norms are not merely private preferences multiplied across a population. They depend on what agents believe others do and what agents believe others expect them to do. Bicchieri's expectation-sensitive account explains why compliance can be conditional, why different norms become focal in different settings, and why inefficient norms can persist (Bicchieri, 2006). That variability matters: a human-built norm system can coordinate conduct without being infallible, universal, or morally admirable.

Enforcement is one part of the picture. In a controlled public-goods setting, Fehr and Gächter found that costly punishment of defectors could sustain cooperation when punishment was available (Fehr & Gächter, 2002). The result is not a general proof that punishment is always legitimate or effective. It is a concrete counterexample to the claim that strangers cannot sustain cooperation without divine statutes. It also reveals a danger: the capacity to punish supports social order only when the rules and targets of punishment are themselves open to criticism.

3.4 Institutions and learned repair

Institutions turn repeated problems into rules, monitoring practices, graduated sanctions, appeal procedures, and opportunities for revision. Ostrom's studies of common-pool resources document both success and failure in self-governance, showing that communities sometimes maintain shared resources without a single external sovereign solution (Ostrom, 1990). No one case establishes a universal recipe. The larger lesson is that social order is sensitive to design.

The institutional point is especially important for moral criticism. Human norms can entrench caste, slavery, patriarchy, exclusion, or cruelty. A social-mechanism account should predict that possibility rather than hide it. Norms coordinate, but coordination is not justification. Institutions improve when criticism, testimony, counterevidence, widened standing, and revised incentives expose the damage a settled rule imposes. The capacity for correction is therefore part of social order, not evidence that every inherited order deserves obedience.

Table 2 summarizes the cumulative case. No strand proves moral anti-realism, and no strand alone explains all cooperation. Together they remove the alleged explanatory vacuum on which the social-collapse version of the lawgiver argument depends.

Evidence strand	Ordinary expectation	Comparative force	Limit
Shared vulnerability	Agents have reasons to avoid injury, betrayal, fear, and social breakdown.	Explains why harm and care become recurrent objects of rules.	Does not decide whether those reasons are objectively categorical.
Reciprocity and reputation	Behavior changes with future interaction, observability, and partner choice.	Makes conditional cooperation expected without cosmic legislation.	Does not guarantee impartiality or universal concern.
Norm expectations and punishment	Compliance varies with shared expectations and enforceable costs.	Explains stability, local difference, and sometimes rapid change.	A stable or enforced norm may be unjust.
Institutional design	Monitoring, participation, sanctions, and revision affect collective outcomes.	Explains why communities can succeed or fail under different arrangements.	Institutions require evaluation; functionality is not moral truth.
Mixed moral record	Cooperation coexists with tribalism, domination, reform, and reversal.	Fits agents who are social, biased, educable, and institution-dependent.	A lawgiver account can accommodate the record, but accommodation is not distinctive prediction.

Table 2: Cumulative support for the live social-mechanism comparator. Together the strands make variable cooperation intelligible without settling whether any norm is objectively true.

4. The Comparative Evidential Result

This is the paper's central comparative result. A merely possible natural account would defeat a claim of strict logical entailment. The scholarship just reviewed supports a stronger, though still defeasible, conclusion: ordinary social mechanisms make central features of the observed record positively expected. Cooperation should arise under some conditions and decay under others. Norms should be locally stable yet historically revisable. Enforcement should sometimes solve a free-rider problem and sometimes reproduce injustice. Institutions should matter.

The divine-lawgiver hypothesis can be made compatible with the same record. A proponent may say that a deity created social capacities, works through natural mechanisms, permits cultural variation, or expects humans to build institutions. Those replies may be coherent. But compatibility does not create a likelihood advantage. Once the observed pattern is already expected under the comparator, the pattern cannot be counted as distinctive evidence for a lawgiver unless the theistic account identifies some further difference that the comparator does not predict as well.

The social-order bridge

If widespread but variable cooperation is substantially expected under ordinary social mechanisms, then the bare existence of cooperation does not by itself favor a personal lawgiver over that comparator. A lawgiver inference needs an additional observation that is more expected if the lawgiver hypothesis is true.

This rule blocks a common double standard. Cooperation cannot be credited to divine guidance while conflict is dismissed as human corruption unless the theory states in advance which outcomes divine guidance predicts and why. A theory that counts every cooperative success as divine evidence and every failure as human interference has insulated itself from comparison. It may remain possible, but it no longer earns confirmation from the social record.

The argument does not claim that a non-lawgiver account has solved every problem in ethics. It has not explained why any norm is objectively true, why some reasons are categorical, or why a person should be moral when exploitation is safe and profitable. Those are genuine problems. The relevant point is comparative: an unsolved problem in one account is not evidence for another account unless the alternative solves it with fewer or smaller difficulties.

The first two shortcuts are therefore blocked for different reasons. Discomfort does not entail necessity, and a social record already made intelligible by a live comparator does not provide distinctive confirmation of a lawgiver.

5. Objective Truth Does Not Mean Personal Command

The next shortcut begins not with social order but with moral objectivity. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that objective moral truths exist. A further premise is still needed to reach a personal lawgiver: every objective moral obligation must be issued or authorized by a personal commander. That premise is not part of the meaning of *objective*. Objectivity concerns whether truth depends on actual endorsement; command concerns a relation between persons.

The range of live philosophical positions exposes the gap. Railton defends a naturalistic moral realism (Railton, 1986). Enoch defends robust, irreducible normative realism without making a personal deity its ground (Enoch, 2011). Constructivist approaches attempt to explain normative authority through practical standpoints or procedures rather than discovery of a cosmic statute (Street, 2010). Error theorists deny the relevant objective properties while still examining whether moral language can retain a useful regulative role (Joyce, 2001). These positions cannot all be correct, but their disagreement shows that objectivity, practical authority, and personal command are distinct philosophical commitments.

The strongest theistic reply should not be caricatured. Adams offers an ethics organized around a transcendent Good and a social conception of obligation authorized by divine commands, with goodness connected to the character of a loving deity rather than arbitrary will (Adams, 1999). This is far more sophisticated than saying that raw power makes any command right. Yet sophistication does not turn the view into a logical consequence of moral objectivity. It remains a substantive theory competing with other realist and anti-realist accounts. Its defender must argue for the divine nature, the command relation, and the epistemology of access.

The familiar comparison with logic or mathematics has a limited purpose. Objective logical truths are not usually treated as commands, so objectivity alone does not analytically contain command. Moral obligations may differ because they address agents and action. But that difference is the beginning of the lawgiver advocate's bridge argument, not its conclusion. One must still explain why agent-directed reasons require a commander rather than facts about persons, reasons, relations, or practical agency.

This produces a clean fork. If objectivity does not require personal command, it cannot establish a lawgiver. If it does, that bridge must be defended independently; emotional seriousness and social usefulness do not supply it.

The command bridge

Objective moral truth entails a personal lawgiver only if an additional premise connects objective obligation to personal divine command. That premise is a theory to defend, not part of the definition of objectivity.

6. The Access Burden

The final shortcut concerns public access rather than moral grounding. Even a successful account of divine grounding would leave a practical question: how do human beings identify the relevant requirements? A hidden statute cannot coordinate conduct merely by existing. Communities need a reliable route from alleged source to action-guiding judgment.

The route is not automatic. Texts require interpretation; traditions select and rank texts; authorities disagree about jurisdiction; conscience reflects formation; and claimed revelations must be distinguished from error, interest, and projection. A divine source may exist while every human access channel remains fallible. That possibility protects the ontology, but it limits the public claim.

The relevant companion argument is that a strong claim of distinctively clear divine access should produce some recognizable reliability advantage over ordinary human mediation. Persistent high-stakes disagreement, conflict about interpretive rules, and historical reversal put pressure on that stronger claim without refuting moral truth or theism (Stilwell, 2026). The access burden therefore parallels the grounding burden: do not infer reliable knowledge from a claimed source unless the connecting mechanism is itself supported.

The title-page visual compresses this point under the phrase *access burden*. Its strongest defensible reading is modest. Religious disagreement shows that claiming a divine source does not by itself deliver public moral clarity. It does not show that no community ever gains moral insight through religion. Nor does it show that nonreligious communities converge. The comparison asks for a distinctive and independently demonstrated advantage.

7. Objections and Replies

7.1 Without objective morality, anything goes

This objection combines ontology with social permission. Even if objective moral facts do not exist, it does not follow that agents lose interests, vulnerability, empathy, reciprocal dependence, or the ability to demand reasons from one another. Laws, institutions, sanctions, relationships, and practical consequences remain. “Anything goes” describes a collapse of every reason and constraint, not the mere denial of one metaethical theory.

The reply should not be overstated. A non-realist account still owes an explanation of criticism that does more than report preference. Constructivist, contractual, expressivist, and fictionalist programs answer that challenge differently. This paper need not select among them. It is enough that social restraint and moral argument do not logically vanish with robust realism.

7.2 Evolutionary explanation debunks morality

Street’s Darwinian dilemma presses realist theories to explain why evaluative attitudes shaped by selection should track stance-independent truths (Street, 2006). That is a serious challenge, not a settled demonstration that every moral judgment is false. Genealogy can undermine confidence when a belief-forming process is insensitive to

truth, but an explanation of a capacity's origin does not automatically decide the truth of every belief produced with that capacity.

The appropriate conclusion is diagnostic. Evolutionary and cultural accounts can explain why cooperation and moral attitudes arise without a lawgiver. Whether any resulting judgment is objectively true requires further epistemology. The same separation protects the argument from turning a functional explanation into an ontological verdict.

7.3 Cooperation is not yet moral obligation

Much cooperation is strategic, conditional, and partial. A person may help only to protect reputation or avoid punishment. That is true: an explanation of cooperation is not yet a theory of moral obligation. But the lawgiver argument under review often claims that social order or reasons for restraint would be impossible without cosmic legislation. Strategic and relational mechanisms directly answer that practical claim.

The objection also underestimates the continuity between prudence and moral practice. Apology, trust, standing, reciprocity, testimony, and protection of vulnerable persons create spaces in which agents ask not only what works but what can be justified to others. The existence of that practice does not settle metaethics; it shows why the choice is not between divine command and predation.

7.4 A necessarily good divine nature avoids arbitrariness

Perhaps moral requirements express the nature of a necessarily loving and good deity rather than arbitrary commands. This reply improves the theory by connecting authority with character. It does not, however, follow from social order. The defender must still establish that the relevant divine nature exists, that goodness is explained rather than presupposed, that obligations have the proposed command relation, and that human beings can identify the requirements reliably.

The reply is therefore a live alternative, not a free bridge. It may succeed through independent metaphysical and epistemic arguments. The present conclusion remains: cooperation, moral seriousness, and objective truth do not supply those arguments by themselves.

7.5 Non-theistic societies borrow moral capital

The “borrowed capital” reply says that secular cooperation survives only because earlier religious norms shaped the culture. Historical inheritance certainly matters. No society begins from zero. But inheritance does not establish metaphysical dependence. Legal systems, languages, markets, and scientific institutions also inherit structures whose continued function does not depend on the truth of every belief held by their founders.

The claim becomes evidentially useful only when it identifies a distinctive pattern: what behavior should deteriorate, on what timetable, under which controls, and why ordinary mechanisms cannot sustain it. Without such a specification, every success can be labeled residual religion and every failure insufficient residue. That makes the claim difficult to test and prevents it from distinguishing explanations.

8. A Better Burden of Proof

The central demand is not that every lawgiver account be impossible. It is that each transition in the argument earn its own support. Many worldviews can organize moral experience into a meaningful narrative; the proper question is what follows from the evidence offered.

A disciplined moral-lawgiver argument should answer four questions:

1. What exact moral fact, obligation, or social pattern is under explanation?

2. Why is that pattern less expected under natural, social, institutional, realist, constructivist, or skeptical alternatives?
3. What bridge connects objectivity or obligation to personal command rather than to another account of reasons?
4. What public method identifies the command and distinguishes it from interpretation, culture, and authority claims?

These questions do not presume that theism is false. They prevent an argument from taking credit for a conclusion at one level because a premise is attractive at another. Moral concern may motivate inquiry. Social cooperation may need explanation. Objective truth may be real. Divine command may be coherent. But the path among them must be shown.

The practical implication is equally direct. Build and evaluate institutions using what can be publicly examined: harms, benefits, agency, reciprocity, consistency, testimony, incentives, error correction, and protection from domination. If a divine source is also proposed, test the additional claim by the same comparative standard. What observable or argumentative difference does it make, and what would count against it?

9. Conclusion

Social order does not require a moral lawgiver as a matter of logic, and its existence does not by itself favor a lawgiver as an explanation. Shared vulnerability, joint activity, reciprocity, reputation, enforcement, norm expectations, and institutional design make both cooperation and its failures intelligible without cosmic legislation. Their cumulative force is not that every human norm is true. It is that the alleged non-theistic vacuum does not exist.

Objective moral truth, if granted, still does not contain personal command. A lawgiver conclusion requires a bridge from reasons or obligations to an authoritative person, followed by an account of how human communities reliably identify that authority's requirements. Sophisticated theistic theories may attempt both tasks; moral seriousness and social order do not complete them in advance.

The principal boundary should remain visible. Nothing here disproves theism, moral realism, or a divine moral ground. The conclusion is evidential and argumentative: discomfort is not demonstration, social function is not moral ontology, objectivity is not command, and a claimed source is not public access. Compatibility with the evidence is not confirmation. Readers should therefore stop treating moral seriousness, social necessity, or objectivity as shortcuts to a cosmic legislator and demand the missing bridges explicitly.

A. Formal Reconstruction of the Central Thesis

A.1 Plain-language reconstruction

- P1.** The emotional importance of moral objectivity, or fear of social collapse without it, does not entail that a personal divine lawgiver exists.
- P2.** If the observed mixture of cooperation, conflict, stable norms, and institutional variation is at least as expected under ordinary social mechanisms as under the personal-divine-lawgiver hypothesis, then that record does not increase the lawgiver hypothesis's odds over the social-mechanism comparator.
- P3.** On the evidence evaluated here, that mixed record is at least as expected under the comparator: reciprocity, reputation, shared intentionality, expectation-sensitive norms, enforcement, and institutional design positively expect it, while the bare lawgiver appeal supplies no established discriminatory prediction.
- P4.** Even if objective moral obligations exist, a personal lawgiver follows only if objective obligation requires personal divine command; that bridge is a substantive disputed premise, not part of the meaning of objectivity.

- P5.** A claimed divine source supplies no public moral advantage unless a reliable access mechanism connects the source to action-guiding judgments.
- C.** Therefore social order, moral seriousness, and objective moral truth do not by themselves establish or comparatively confirm a personal divine lawgiver. A divine ground remains possible, but it requires independent support for the command bridge and for reliable access.

A.2 Symbols

- D : the datum that denying objective morality or divine lawgiving feels intolerable or socially dangerous.
- H_L : the hypothesis that a personal divine lawgiver explains and authorizes moral requirements.
- H_N : the comparator on which ordinary social capacities and institutions explain the observed social record without requiring a divine lawgiver.
- E : the observed mixture of cooperation, conflict, norm stability, norm change, and institutional sensitivity.
- O : at least one objective moral obligation exists.
- B : the bridge premise $O \rightarrow H_L$: if an objective moral obligation exists, a personal divine lawgiver exists and authorizes moral requirements.
- P : a probability function used to compare hypotheses conditional on evidence.

A.3 Symbolic form

The move from discomfort to a lawgiver is a non-entailment:

$$D \not\Rightarrow H_L.$$

The comparative inference can be stated without assigning numerical likelihoods:

$$P(E \mid H_N) \geq P(E \mid H_L) \implies \frac{P(H_L \mid E)}{P(H_N \mid E)} \leq \frac{P(H_L)}{P(H_N)}.$$

The objectivity-to-command step has a separate structure:

$$O, \underbrace{O \rightarrow H_L}_B \vdash H_L, \quad O \not\vdash H_L \text{ without } B.$$

The first display states that D supplies no deductive route to H_L ; it does not deny the psychological importance of D . The Bayesian inference is deductively valid when the hypotheses have positive prior probability and the stated likelihood inequality holds. The objectivity inference is ordinary modus ponens once B is added, but O alone does not yield H_L . The validity of those conditional forms does not make their substantive premises certain. The cooperation literature gives qualitative, inductive support to the claim that E is substantially expected under H_N ; it does not provide a measured universal likelihood ratio. The truth of B remains contested among divine-command theorists, non-theistic realists, constructivists, and skeptics, while the access premise remains an epistemic burden stated in the plain-language reconstruction. The bounded conclusion is therefore comparative and defeasible, not a deductive disproof of H_L .

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