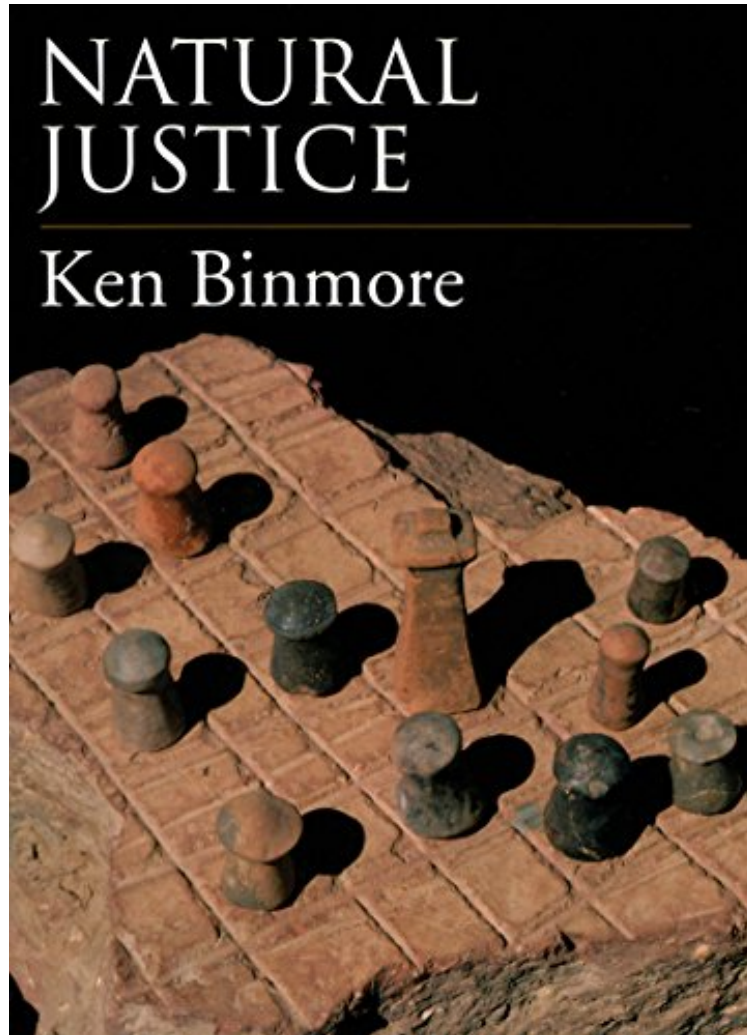


## Natural Justice

*Ken Binmore*

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**Ken Binmore : Natural Justice** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Natural Justice:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Nicholas GeiserArrived as described and early!0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy CustomerEssential reading26 of 26 people found the following review helpful. GroundbreakingBy JJ vd WeeleEven though it is not always as clear as it should have been, this is a brilliant book. To moral philosophy, Binmore applies Marx' famous dictum reversed: We have tried to change the world, now it is time to understand it. According to Binmore, prevailing theories have taught us little about how justice actually works. Instead of relying on evidence on the nature of ourselves and our societies, they have invoked various utopian "Gods", such as rationality or the impartial spectator, when talking about morality. In Binmore's trademark fluent and militant style he scorns especially Kantian philosophy, that is referred to as the `dark age of

moral reasoning', and has led to 'absurdly implausible rules'. (In another passage we are told that the self-proclaimed pundits of moral philosophy 'have no more access to some noumenal world of moral absolutes than the boy who delivers our newspapers'.) Instead, says Binmore, we need to study the actual rules that people use and see where they come from: How did they evolve and why do they survive? Moral relativism indeed, but of a very persuasive sort. According to Binmore, fairness rules have evolved to help societies select between equilibria in various coordination games that arise in life. Societies that selected the more efficient equilibria have survived, resulting in our current and constantly evolving social contract. Or in the more eloquent words of Binmore: "Fairness is the social tool washed up on the human beach by the tide of evolution for solving [...] coordination problems [...]". Although this summarizes the basic philosophy underlying the whole book, the full theory expounded in it is a great deal more complicated. It offers a Rawlsian argument in which people bargain in the original position about the outcome of a coordination game, a process made possible by the existence of "empathic preferences". In this process, people use certain fairness rules and social indices for interpersonal utility comparison. According to Binmore, the latter indices evolve, to eventually be such that the fairness rules lead to an efficient (Nash) bargaining outcome. The result is a theory of the coevolution of a genetically determined possibility to empathize with each other and a culturally determined set of social indices. Even though the book is a non-technical summary of Binmore's "Game theory and the social contract", it is far from an easy read. There is a fair deal of bargaining and game theory to be swallowed and the exposition is not always as clear as one would hope. Also, it will carry many readers into uncharted terrain, since the book brims with concepts from decision theory, game theory, political philosophy, biology, and evolutionary theory. But in the end, this is what makes the book so immensely rewarding. Here is a first stab at a whole new theory of morality, and it is so full of ideas that it can keep an army of scholars busy for a long time to follow up on all of them. Most of the ideas may be crude, controversial, incomplete and some even wrong, but they are invariably exciting. 10 Years of thinking by one of the finest minds in economics have yielded a treasure pot for a naturalistic approach to morality.

This book lays out foundations for a "science of morals." Binmore uses game theory as a systematic tool for investigating ethical matters. He reinterprets classical social contract ideas within a game-theory framework and generates new insights into the fundamental questions of social philosophy. In contrast to the previous writing in moral philosophy that relied on vague notions such as "societal well-being" and "moral duty," Binmore begins with individuals; rational decision-makers with the ability to empathize with one another. Any social arrangement that prescribes them to act against their interests will become unstable and eventually will be replaced by another, until one is found that includes worthwhile actions for all individuals involved.