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EDITORIAL

Special Issue on "Crooked Thinking or Straight Talk: Modernizing Epicurean Scientific Philosophy"

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The extended comments by distinguished philosophers and economists on Ken Binmore's modernization of Epicurean scientific philosophy that are collected in this special issue of Homo Oeconomicus speak for themselves. But except for mentioning it in the title Binmore does not explicitly address the methodological issues raised by pursuing a program of "scientific philosophy". It seems that he deems it sufficient to practise in the book what he preaches in its title.

We tend to agree. Yet, many if not most philosophers and scientists regard "scientific philosophy" as an oxymoron.

1 Philosophia and Scientia

According to a prevailing tradition 'scientia' and 'philosophia' were used synonymously—distinguished simply by their Latin respectively Greek roots. As David Wootton argues in his impressive reconstruction of "the invention of science" (Wootton, 2016) this use of concepts still prevailed in the Anglo Saxon world of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Only then the social practice of science transformed itself from a process of creative theory invention to a *discovery* of facts.

After this revolutionary change of the practices and the concept of 'science' an author like Ken Binmore's declared philosophical hero David Hume still uses the terms "philosophy" and "science" as broadly synonymous in his "attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects" (Hume, 1739). In view of the aforementioned changes in meaning of underlying concepts, tracing 'scientific philosophy' even further back to the work of Epicurus seems problematic. Epicurus—perhaps mediated by the re-discovery of Lucretius' poem

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"de rerum natura" (see for a popular treatment (Greenblatt, 2011))—certainly has inspired the Enlightenment. But to ascribe to him the view that philosophy as a whole should be conducted as a science in the modern sense of a practice of discovery may be somewhat daring.

But we fully agree with Binmore that all science needs to be straight talk. Indeed, philosophers' 'crooked talk' has often been "clear as mud but it covered the ground. And the confusion made the brain go 'round'" (Harry Belafonte, Man Piaba). But not all straight talk is science.

2 Straight Talk and Science

For example, in a comment on Tim Rakow's reflections on Frank Knight's work Daniel Kahneman (see appendix to (Rakow, 2010)) stipulates that a reflection on the history of science "is not how science is done":

> "Science is essentially a conversation in which people respond to what others have most recently said, or to the ideas that are currently dominant. Ideas that change the direction of the conversation are new because they are new in the conversation not because no one has had them before. The exercise of finding that 'new' ideas are similar to earlier ideas is profoundly affected by hindsight and typically (as in this case) ignores the conversational context. In our case [Tversky and Kahneman, M.H. and H.K.] we stumbled for years before we truly understood what we meant by our own work on heuristics and on prospect theory. Reading Knight would not have helped us at all we would not have recognized that what he said meant the same thing as what we said, and indeed it did not (because what we said in prospect theory was a reaction to the idea that utility is attached to final states, which was dominant in decision theory at that time, but had of course been asserted by Bernoulli in 1738). I don't think many psychologists draw their hypotheses from Plato or Montaigne, though these authors certainly said many things that sound similar to ideas that people proudly publish in Psychological Science." (Kahneman comments to Rakow, 2010, 463–464)

To the extent that Binmore's straight talk is in fact part of a conversation among self-declared scientific philosophers it would qualify as science according to the entirely path-dependent criteria Kahneman invokes. Yet, this would not do justice to Binmore's approach.

To put it bluntly, we see Binmore as endorsing some form of critical realism which independently of any 'conversation' insists that science seeks to discover facts about 'reality out there'. One way to correct a mistaken path may be going back to past 'conversations' and to seek to discover facts 'from there'. Seen in this light, going back to Epicurus is an entirely legitimate step in an effort of modernizing scientific philosophy.

3 Binmore as Scientific Philosopher

Most of Binmore's work is not directly empirical but indirectly preparing the ground for empirical disciplinary science. Going beyond the fashions of the day (as celebrated as the core of science by Kahneman) Binmore has a track record of successfully raising interesting questions concerning the relationship between the objective structures of game-forms and the subjective games played on the basis of these game-forms. He has also always insisted that social theory should look at what he regards as robust findings of facts.

But the empirics were certainly not his main focus. Binmore's work on auctions is proof of his impressive competence in making practical use of empirical evidence-based technological knowledge (in the sense of (H. Albert, 1985) and (M. Albert, 2022)). However, at the same time, such a central issue as whether institutionalized morality can exist if an equilibrium cannot be assigned to the game-form of a particular social interaction is not addressed in an empirical spirit by Binmore. The subjective dynamics of preference formation within plays of games are more or less brushed aside to get on with what can be said in terms of the "objective payoffs" of the game-form (i.e., the territory where Ken Binmore feels most comfortable).

We do not doubt that focusing on game-forms as a rule may be a good start of analyses—perhaps often the only kind of thorough analyses that are viable. We, however, believe that the Folk Theorem *logic* and equilibrium selection in repeated game-forms alone cannot do justice to how the division of labor is in fact extended to the enforcement of institutionalized norms in society (see (Hume, 1739), Bk III, pt II, chap 7). The co-evolutionary process of "genes, mind and culture" (Lumsden & Wilson, 1981) may in certain parts be beyond Folk Theorem wisdom but Ken Binmore's use of it certainly leaves us wiser.

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