

## Contract Theory, Hypothetical Thinking, and the Normativity of Public Morality

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### Abstract

Hypothetical contract theory commonly faces the standard objection that because hypothetical contracts are not contracts at all, the theory is both unable to justify the fundamental principles of public morality for actual political societies. Also, it is arguably incapable of imposing obligations of public morality on real people. I shall argue that a Rawlsian type of hypothetical contract theory is capable of providing adequate and reasonable responses to the standard objection, and that the original-position type of hypothetical thinking has two important normative functions for our practical matters. One: it explains how this method of hypothetical thinking produces objective principles of public morality. Two: it provides guidance by giving reasons and motives to comply with the principles of public morality produced by the hypothetical approach.

**Key Words:** hypothetical contract theory, Rawls, hypothetical thinking, two respects of practical normativity of public morality, a minimal conception of objectivity