

What Normativity Could Be

Contemporary work on normativity often conceives the normative realm in terms of requirements or obligations, with something like necessary authority for rational beings. However, it is possible to act in accord with requirements or obligations, even to do so with a sense of their necessity, without finding in this the kind of purpose, value, or ideal that would give such behavior meaning. Our understanding of normativity, therefore, needs to broaden to give a more important role to *evaluative* experience and thought—not as a *judgment* of worth, but as an active appreciation of it and its ground. Indeed, Kant marked the distinction between mere “legality” and genuine “morality” not in terms of complying with the “moral law”, but in terms of just this sort of appreciation of the value such law embodies, grounded in the worth of persons. Attention to the evaluative and appreciative element of the normative can also help us understand the *structure* of the normative realm--and, in particular, how norm-based and evaluative elements work together to make it possible for thought and action to create a shared domain of normative meaning, assessment, and action.