

# Research project B11

## Normativity and Freedom

### Mitarbeiter

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### Project description

The relationship between normativity and freedom is twofold. On the one hand, reasonable norms presuppose that their addressees are able to act accordingly. This idea is expressed, for example, in the principles “impossibilium nulla obligatio” and “ought implies can”. On the other hand, norms constrain the freedom of their addressees.

Traditionally, both relations have been judged to be so close that they are used as inferences. Especially, a conclusion is drawn from lacking relevant capabilities to the non-applicability or failed prevalence of the norm in question. Persons who think, whether correctly or incorrectly, that they are unable to fulfil a certain norm sooner or later will call it into question and criticise its legitimacy. Analogously, persons who experience some norm primarily as limitation of their freedom in time also will develop qualms concerning its legitimacy. Maybe they would still recognize its social relevance or prevalence. However, they surely would be keen to ignore it if they had something to gain and if it were possible without getting sanctioned.

Prima facie, both of these individual reactions as well as their generalizations seem to be rational. No wonder, both inferences always have been used to destabilize existing norms and to initiate processes of transformation or subversion. In extreme cases, these processes may well lead to the total breakdown of some normatively constituted social or political order.

The philosophical project is not only concerned with the critical examination of those two classical and complementary inferences but with the conceptual foundations and social relevance of the relationship between normativity and freedom as a whole as well. The project, therefore, focuses on one of the great problems critically discussed and having developed enormous influence on intellectual history, both philosophical and non-philosophical, since antiquity.

The philosophical project thus will contribute to the interdisciplinary goals of the “Collaborative Research Centre” (SFB) in two ways. Firstly, it will raise awareness of those implicit “negative values” and “latent violence” that may emerge from once established norms. Secondly, it will help to gain a better understanding of limits and potential of those

attempts to justify processes of social or political restructuring that rely on certain interpretations of the relation between normativity and freedom.

In accordance with the two classical inferences mentioned above, the project is divided into two subprojects:

## **Subprojects**

### **Subproject 1: "Ought Without Can?" (Michael Kühler)**

In subproject 1 "Ought Without Can?", Michael Kuehler discusses the question, whether it may be plausible to reject normative claims, or even to classify them as meaningless or pointless right from the start, on the ground that their addressees lack some relevant capacity to fulfil them. The subproject, hence, is concerned with the first inference, namely the idea that freedom functions as a prerequisite for reasonable norms. Working hypothesis of the subproject is that missing capacities do not render normative claims meaningless or pointless, at least not in every respect. The assumption to reject normative claims by pointing to some relevantly missing "can", therefore, would underlie certain limitations.

### **Subproject 2: "Do We Need Norms to Be Free?" (Nadja Jelinek)**

In subproject 2 "Do We Need Norms to Be Free?", Nadja Jelinek questions the general claim that normative commitments exclude freedom. The subproject, quite on the contrary, assumes that normative commitments by no means only restrain the freedom of those committed. Firstly, the relatively weak claim that normative commitments of agents are at least compatible with their freedom is being discussed. Secondly, the stronger claim whether the sheer existence of certain kinds of freedom might presuppose normative commitments in the first place is being put to the test.