

# NON-DEONTIC NORMS AND MERE TOLERATION: COMMENTS ON VALENTINI'S MORALITY AND SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED NORMS

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## I. Non-Deontic Norms

### The Content and Flavor of Norms

Laura's norms are all deontic:

- [ $\phi$ -ing is required]
- [ $\phi$ -ing is permitted]

Consider norms with non-deontic content:

- [ $\phi$ -ing is recommended but not required]
- [S has (non-requiring) pro tanto reason  $\phi$ ]
- [ $\phi$ -ing is good or ideal in some way]
- [Being disposed to  $\phi$  (or disposed to take  $p$  as a reason to  $\phi$ ) is virtuous (but not required)]

For example: norms about what is *socially ideal* but not *required*.

Warmth Norm: Ideal members of the department are warm to one another.

I'm cold  $\rightarrow$  no one is/feels wronged, but they are disappointed in me.

Two Dimensions of Failure

- Behavioral: Failure of warmth in *action*
- Aretaic: Failure of warmth in *character* (noticing, reasoning, affective responsiveness)

### The Normativity of Non-Deontic Norms

Can we just use agency respect to ground non-deontic norms moral significance? No.

Action Recommended but not Required: Quinn has some reason to  $\phi$  ( $\phi$  = be warm/act warmly to colleagues).

In virtue of what do I have reason to be warm/act warmly?

Empirical Fact: Because a socially constructed norm recommends (though does not require) it.

The full text of my remarks are on my website, [pqinnwhite.com](http://pqinnwhite.com).

There are all kinds of normative categories that might be at stake here (and debates about how to understand them). For example the suberogatory (a la Driver), the indecent (Calhoun), personal bonds or normative hopes (Martin), disappointment of ideals (Telech and Katz), failings of second-personal relations of the heart (Darwall), violations of ordinary duties with strange features like pragmatic self-defeat (Fricker).

I am setting aside the rival views Valentini considers in Ch. 2.

The norm also must meet various conditions: it is authentically adopted, not too costly to obey, and has morally permissible content.

In virtue of what does the fact that  $\phi$ -ing is recommended (though not required) by a socially constructed norm ground the existence of a(n additional) reason to  $\phi$ ?

Target general moral principle: Because you have an obligation to respect people's commitments (i.e., "to give *agency respect* to people").

Problem: Coldness turns out to be disrespectful, i.e., *wrong*.

A different approach: expand the spirit of Valentini's approach, looking not just to *respect* but other forms of *regard for individuals*. Respect anchors deontic norms; *care* anchors non-deontic norms.

The Expanded Agency *Regard* View (schematically):

Action Required: You are required to  $\phi$ . ( $\phi$  = respond to colleagues' emails quickly).

In virtue of what is S required?

Empirical Fact: Because a socially constructed norm requires it.

In virtue of what does the fact that  $\phi$ -ing is required by a socially constructed norm ground the existence of moral requirement?

Target general moral principle  $P$ : Because you have an obligation to respect people's commitments (i.e., "to give *agency respect* to people").

Action Recommended but not Required: You have strong but not requiring reason to  $\psi$  ( $\psi$  = be warm to colleagues).

In virtue of what do I have reason to be warm?

Empirical Fact: Because a socially constructed norm recommends (though does not require) it.

In virtue of what does the fact that  $\psi$ -ing is recommended (though not required) by a socially constructed norm ground the existence of a(n additional) reason to  $\psi$ ?

Target general moral principle  $P'$ : Because *caring for others* is recommended (but not required), and caring for others involves caring about other people's non-deontic commitments which recommend, without requiring, ways of relating interpersonally.

A worry:

As Laura understands  $P$ , The requirement to respect others is not socially constructed or sensitive to social norms.

But  $P'$  is not like that—the amount of *care* that we should bear towards others is *deeply* socially contingent.

To see that, contrast the following claims:

1. "I have more reason to respect my colleagues than I do strangers on the street."
2. "I have more reason to care for my colleagues than strangers on the street."

(1) is (profoundly) false; (2) is true!

There is some nuance here; contrast my being simply cold with my going out of my way to *flaunt* my violation of the warmth norm.

Of course, what it takes to respect my colleagues differs from strangers; that is what Valentini seeks to explain.

## II. Mere Toleration

The worry: The Agency Respect View yields a kind of second-best way of relating to others under social norms.

Central Example: I am required to take off my shoes in the Hindu Temple.

Practice-Internal Considerations: the goddess wants me to.

Practice-External Consideration: agency respect.

Note that we have a *special* name for this kind of thing: Toleration.

But *tolerance* is not the paradigm of social-norm-governed relations with others. Imagine a norm in my department requires we respond to emails to one another very quickly.

AGENCY RESPECT ACCOUNT I am required to respond to emails within a day or two because my colleagues are committed to the norm.

INHABITING THE SOCIAL NORM/PRACTICE Part of what it is to fully inhabit my role as a member of my department involves *my valuing timeliness*.

My worry is not that Agency Respect *doesn't* capture something true; it's that it offers only a kind of second-best *backstop*. Really, I should value timeliness.

To see this, imagine I first violate the norm, then come to obey it. You (my colleague) ask me why. I say:

“I don't share your value of timeliness as important. But I respect *you* in a way that is independent of the content of your norms. If it were a social norm that we remove our shoes in the department because the gods of philosophy demand it, I'd do that, too, and for the same reason I answer email quickly. In the same way that I tolerate others' religious practices, however independently unjustified, and respect them, I have come to realize I should tolerate our (equally curious) email norms as well. I am equally confused by both the temple and the email norms, but I don't need to appreciate them *from the inside* to respect your commitments.”

That is a bit disappointing/frustrating/second-best.

cf. my “Honesty and Discretion,” which develops a social-norm-based account of the norms of truth-telling.

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