



The Anna Tumarkin Lectures in Philosophy

May 27 – 29, 2024

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Normative Powers

If you ask me to borrow my laptop and I answer in the affirmative, I turn what would have been theft into a loan. By promising to meet you for lunch, I acquire an obligation, correlative to your right, to do so. If we commit to each other as romantic partners, we acquire a distinctive set of rights and obligations vis-à-vis one another. And so on. These familiar statements suggest that human beings possess special kinds of powers, namely powers to change normative facts or “normative powers.” A gesture or a word on their part can create new rights, permissions, and prohibitions. The aim of these lectures is to investigate the nature and significance of these powers. The first lecture will seek to dispel the mystery of normative powers, explaining how it is possible for us to create new normative facts seemingly at will. The second lecture will explore the existence conditions of normative powers, and argue that such powers cannot exist—i.e., we cannot possess them—in the absence of conventional norms conferring them upon us. In other words, normative powers are not part of “natural morality.” Finally, the third lecture will illustrate how treating normative powers as convention-dependent—as opposed to “natural”—surprisingly enables us to offer even deeper critiques of morally problematic social practices.

27. May 2024, 18:15 h, Lecture 1:

Solving the mystery of normative powers

Apéro after the lecture, all welcome

28. May 2024, 18:15 h, Lecture 2:

Normative powers and conventional norms

29. May 2024, 18:15 h, Lecture 3:

Personal sovereignty, conventional norms, and social critique

Where: Room 120, Hauptgebäude der Universität Bern, Hochschulstrasse 4, 3012 Bern

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