

R. Jay Wallace, “The Deontic Structure of Morality”

Normative reasons apparently come in different varieties. Some are attractive or aspirational, recommending actions in a way that leaves the agent some scope to ignore their claims; other reasons—including those at the center of morality—seem peremptory, demanding compliance in a way that the agent has no discretion to ignore. This paper offers an interpretation of the distinction between what I call aspirational and deontic normativity, paying special attention to the moral realm. I suggest that deontic reasons are grounded in principles that specify reciprocal normative claims, structuring our relationships to other agents. Some conceptions of morality seem much better suited than others to accommodate this distinctive kind of deontic normativity, a thesis I defend by contrasting consequentialist and contractualist approaches.