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Actions as Normative Claims

My paper argues for the following thesis: from the point of view of practical philosophy, actions should be understood as normative claims. As we say, “Actions speak louder than words”; in more philosophical terms, action is how normativity enters the world. This idea is essentially a development of Kant’s claim that actions enact a maxim. On my thesis, this is not a metaphysical fact, let alone a psychological one. Instead, actions gain this status to the extent that people recognise an implicit duty to see actions in this way. These duties correspond to the moral authority borne by responsible persons – to judge what they should be doing and how they should interact with others. When they hold one another responsible, they contest claims and expose them to critical scrutiny. When they approve of or cooperate with initiatives, they admit those claims into their lived morality. By seeing one another, and themselves, as claim-makers they take responsibility for realising morality together, and the result is co-legislation in action.