

PRESS RELEASE 06/2023

## Ethics Council: Normality as a questionable point of orientation

Berlin, 18 October 2023

On 20 October 2023, the German Ethics Council discusses in a public hearing the societal relevance of normality and normalisation processes. The exchange with experts will focus in particular on how ideas of normality provide normative orientation, for example by shaping body ideals or concepts of health and disease. The second part of the hearing on 16 November 2023 will also address the diverse relationships between normality and normativity.

What is considered “normal” is by no means fixed, but depends on the context at hand and is in part subject to considerable change. The German Ethics Council is currently examining the dynamics of ideas of normality, particularly in the life sciences. In dialogue with three experts from the fields of philosophy, psychiatry and media studies, the Council wants to identify, among other things, the social actors that influence ideas of normality and the resulting ethical and legal consequences.

On 20 October, firstly the physician and philosopher Thomas Fuchs from Heidelberg University Hospital will speak about the concept of normality in psychiatry. The current tendency to view mental diseases merely as problematic deviations on a spectrum of normality certainly helps to prevent the marginalisation of those affected, but might also favour the rapid increase in the prescription of psychotropic drugs.

Media scientist Friedrich Balke from Ruhr University Bochum then examines the cultural-historical foundations of the discourse on normality. This will include analysing the role of the (mass) media in shifting the “boundaries of normality” in general, and in increasing the flexibility of sexual norms in particular.

In the second part of the hearing on 16 November, philosopher Maren Wehrle from Erasmus University Rotterdam will explore the question “What is (still) normal?”. According to her, notions of normality are not only closely linked to normative assessments, but also influence our perception of actuality and reality.

The hearing on 20 October takes place from 9:30 to 11:30 am and will be broadcast live online at [www.ethikrat.org/live](http://www.ethikrat.org/live). It will be continued on 16 November from 11:00 am to noon. After the event, a video recording and transcript (in German) of both parts of the hearing will be available on the German Ethics Council’s website.

More information can be found at:  
[www.ethikrat.org/en/hearings/normality-and-normalisation-processes](http://www.ethikrat.org/en/hearings/normality-and-normalisation-processes)

### Members

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Prof. Dr. phil. Dr. h. c. Julian Nida-Rümelin (Vice-Chair)  
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