

## PAP *IFF* OIC?

### 1. Two principles, their link and their importance

OIC: If  $S$  ought to have  $\Phi$ ed, then  $S$  could have  $\Phi$ ed.

If  $S$  ought to have not  $\Phi$ ed, then  $S$  could have not  $\Phi$ ed.

$\Phi$ ed = actions or omissions.

$S$  could have  $\Phi$ ed =  $S$  had the ability/opportunity to  $\Phi$  =  $\Phi$ ing was an option for  $S$ .

PAP: If  $S$  was responsible for  $\Phi$ ing,  $S$  could have not  $\Phi$ ed.

PAP-: If  $S$  was blameworthy for  $\Phi$ ing,  $S$  could have not  $\Phi$ ed.

**Link:** Can we derive one from the other? If so, this would

- (a) add support to each principle (~splitters);
- (b) reveal something about the link between blameworthiness and obligations.

**Importance:** free will, nature of obligations, ethics of beliefs.

**Thesis:** The derivation is *interesting* and *stronger than its opponents take it to be* (but, I suspect it ultimately fails).

**Sub-thesis:** To show this, we can use and fine-tune some distinctions.

- (1) Excuses and justifications
- (2) Subjective and objective oughts
- (3) (Eligible and mere options; see Chevarie-Cossette 2021)

### 2. Two derivations and some motivation

BRIDGE 1    If  $S$  was blameworthy for  $\Phi$ ing,  $S$  ought to have not  $\Phi$ ed.

OIC            If  $S$  ought to have not  $\Phi$ ed,  $S$  could have not  $\Phi$ ed.

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PAP-         If  $S$  was blameworthy for  $\Phi$ ing,  $S$  could have not  $\Phi$ ed.

See e.g. Copp (2008), Nelkin (2011).

BRIDGE 2    If  $S$  ought to have not  $\Phi$ ed (and did),  $S$  was blameworthy for  $\Phi$ ing.

PAP-         If  $S$  was blameworthy for  $\Phi$ ing,  $S$  could have not  $\Phi$ ed.

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OIC            If  $S$  ought to have not  $\Phi$ ed (and did),  $S$  could have not  $\Phi$ ed.

Less common (Markosian 1999), implausible as it stands: *excuses* (cf. Weatherston 2019). Amendment?

**Objection:** As soon as we consider excuses (and justifications; see Austin 1956), surely, we lose the motivation for OIC.

**Justification:**  $S$  has a (moral) justification for having  $\Phi$ ed *IFF*  $S$  did the right thing (morally) in  $\Phi$ ing.

**Excuse:**  $S$  has an (moral) excuse for having  $\Phi$ ed *IFF*  $S$  did not do the right thing in  $\Phi$ ing but  $S$  should nevertheless not be (morally) blamed.

A list of fixed 'oughts' corresponding to norms such as 'respect rights'.

**Response** (see also Howard-Snyder 2006, Nelkin 2011):

TIME-TRAVEL: Last week, Sam's young daughter Amanda lost her eyesight in an accident at the kindergarten. Sam, who was at work during the incident, has a duty to protect Amanda. More specifically, Sam has a duty to travel back in time to save Amanda's eyesight. But since he cannot do this, he is excused.

OIC explains why Sam is not merely excused; he lacked the obligation.

Does it matter? Yes: answerability — obligation to explain (Duff 2007).

This invites a tripartite structure (see Baron 2005, Greenberg manuscript):

**Denial:** *S* has a (moral) denial for having  $\Phi$ ed *IFF* *S* did not infringe a moral norm.

**Justification:** *S* has a (moral) justification for having  $\Phi$ ed *IFF* *S* did infringe a moral norm in  $\Phi$ ing, but was right to do so (*S* did what he ought to do).

**Excuse:** *S* has an (moral) excuse for having  $\Phi$ ed *IFF* *S* did not do the right thing in  $\Phi$ ing but *S* should nevertheless not be (morally) blamed.

On the bipartite account, temptation to consider a justified action (an action which satisfies oughts) *flawless*. Not on the tripartite account. & *Moral oughts not special*.

### 3. The Equivocation Challenge

BRIDGE 1     If *S* was blameworthy for  $\Phi$ ing, *S* ought to have not  $\Phi$ ed.

OIC            If *S* ought to have not  $\Phi$ ed, *S* could have not  $\Phi$ ed.

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PAP-          If *S* was blameworthy for  $\Phi$ ing, *S* could have not  $\Phi$ ed.

What 'ought'? Vranas (2007), Haji (1993), Zimmerman (1993), Graham (2011).

Suppose all of my evidence indicates that I can save ten innocent people from being gruesomely killed by pressing a certain button. As a matter of fact, and contrary to all my evidence, however, the ten innocent people will be gruesomely killed only if I press it. Philosophers who distinguish between an objective and a subjective sense of 'ought' would say that in this situation, though I objectively ought not to press the button, I subjectively ought to do so. (Graham 2011, 339–340)

**Equivocation:**

**Objective:** ~Bridge 1

I don't press the button: I'm blameworthy but did what I ought objectively.

Suppose you have a subjective, all-things-considered moral obligation to push a certain button at midnight: you have every reason to believe that a collision between two trains will be prevented if and only if you push the button. Nevertheless, you inexcusably forget to push the button, and the trains collide. Clearly, you are morally blameworthy for failing to push the button (at midnight). Unbeknownst to you, however, the button was inoperative; so pushing it would have made no difference, and objectively you never had an obligation to push it. (Vranas 2007, 193–194)

**Subjective: ~OIC.**

A lifeguard has good reason to believe that a swimmer is drowning and that *he ought to (and can) save him*, but he can't save him.

*Take Bloggs. All of his evidence indicates both that if he presses one button, he will save ten people from being killed and that if he presses another button, he will save only five of the ten from being killed. Unbeknownst to him, he has been given a paralyzing drug that prevents him from being able to press the first button. He in fact presses the second button, motivated by his enmity for one of the ten. If there is a subjective sense of 'ought', then surely Bloggs did not act as he subjectively ought to have acted: what he subjectively ought to have done was press the first button—if things were as his evidence indicates that they are, morality would most surely dictate that he press the first button. This is true despite the fact that he can't press the first button. So, OIC interpreted with a subjective 'ought' is false. (Graham 2011, 340)*

**What is the distinction between subjective and objective oughts?**

We can suppose that an agent, S, has a subjective moral obligation as of a certain time, T, to do an action, A, if and only if S believes [reasonably?], as of T, S (objectively) ought to do A. (Haji 1993, 45)

*The obligation is objective in the sense of corresponding to what is in fact the case about the agent's situation, not necessarily – as a subjective obligation does – to what the agent is epistemically justified in believing to be the case. (Vranas 2007, 169)*

**An ambiguity about a question:**

It's best to avoid multiplying the obligations: **parsimonious** and **illuminating**.

MINE: There was a disaster in the quarry, and 100 miners are trapped in Shaft A; the nearby Shaft B is empty. Mia, who is in charge of the miners' safety, knows that, if she does nothing, the shafts will partly flood and 10 miners will be severely injured. She also knows that, if she blocks the shaft where the miners are she will save all 100; and if she blocks the empty shaft, the other will totally flood, drowning all 100. But her evidence doesn't tell her where the miners are; for her, it's a 50/50 guess. The miners are in fact in shaft A. What ought Mia to do? (see Zimmerman (2006) and Muñoz and Spencer (2020), Kiesewetter 2017, chap. 8.3)

What Mia ought to do, *given all the relevant facts* or *given the facts that she knows*?

*Illuminating for the 'objective obligation' and BRIDGE 1:*

It's clear that, *given all the facts*, Mia ought to block Shaft A, that Bloggs ought to press the second button, and that the train watcher does not have to press a button.

*Illuminating for the 'subjective obligation':*

Mia knows that either she objectively ought to block shaft A or to block shaft B. That's not what she ought to do *given what she knows*.

What Mia should do given the facts she knows  $\neq$  what she should believe  
she <ought to do given  
all the facts>

“Beliefs about a table do not form a subjective table.” – Olivier Massin

“Beliefs about an obligation do not form a subjective obligation.”

### Does ‘ought’ imply ‘can-given-what-one-knows’?

Plausible: conceptually, the object of ‘ought’ is *real options*. (Object of friendship = people, not appearance of people)

Remember: what one ought to do given what one knows  $\neq$  what one should believe one ought <to do given all the facts>. (If it did, we’d have to say that the lifeguard ought, given what he knows, to save the person, etc.)

Lifeguard: ought to jump in the water/try to save the swimmer.

Bloggs: ought to try to press the best button.

Not completely new ‘what A ought to do depends primarily on the facts that are epistemically available to A’ (Kiesewetter 2017, 198) + sympathy for OIC.

What one knows imposes a *restriction* on oughts; it does not *determine it*. What one ought to do in this sense *depends on* what one knows, but it’s not a *function* of what one knows. *What is known applies to the set of real options*.

SUBJECTIVE UTILITARIANISM: Agents ought to maximise expected (reasonably expectable) utility.

SU1.  $S$  ought to  $\Phi$  IFF what  $S$  knows suggests that  $\Phi$ ing is the utility-maximising option.

SU2.  $S$  ought  $\Phi$  IFF  $\Phi$ ing is, amongst  $S$ ’s real options, the one which what  $S$  knows suggests is utility-maximising.

In SU1, the evidence bears on the set of all options which  $S$  deems possible; in SU2, the evidence bears on the set of all of  $S$ ’s available options.

### Objection and asymmetry:

Some proponents of the subjective sense of ‘ought’ may think this a bit too quick. They may think this because they hold that what one subjectively ought to do is constrained by one’s actual options, irrespective of one’s evidence about what options one has, but is still in some way dictated by one’s evidence concerning those options. [...] Any such advocate of the subjective ‘ought’ is under considerable pressure, it seems to me, to explain why one’s obligations are dictated by one’s evidence in this merely partial way; such an advocate must explain why one’s obligations, if they are dictated by one’s evidence at all, are dictated completely by the agent’s evidence about all matters except what he or she can and cannot do. My

suspicion is that a subjective 'ought' only partially so determined by one's evidence will lack a stable motivation. (Graham 2011, 341)

The agent's evidence about what she cannot do *is* on the table (or rather the facts that she knows which concern this).

If what *S* knows *strongly* but *misleadingly* suggests that *S* can  $\Phi$ , this does **not** rule in  $\Phi$  as an ought-candidate. It might make *trying to  $\Phi$*  a good option, given what *S* knows.

If what *S* knows *strongly* but *misleadingly* suggests that *S* cannot  $\Phi$ , this *rules out*  $\Phi$ .

Weirdly asymmetrical? No.

Suppose that I have been chatting with Zeno1990 for a long time online and that I become convinced, falsely, that I am chatting with a very smart chatbot. This *could* rule out the possibility that I am friends with Zeno1990. But if you are chatting with Yara2000, which is a bot, your belief that you're *not* chatting with a bot cannot rule it in as a friend.

**Upshot:** sometimes, a belief that *P* is there (chatbot, obstacle) necessarily rules out *A* (friendship, obligation), but a belief that *P* is *not* instantiated does not rule in *A*.

		'Ought' dependent on what is known?	
		Yes	No
Object of 'ought'?	Apparent options	<b>What <i>S</i> believes she 'ought' given all the facts</b> <i>Not block a shaft.</i> <i>Save the drowning man.</i> Relevant to SU1.	☒
	Real options	<b>'Ought' given what <i>S</i> knows</b> <i>Not block a shaft.</i> <i>Jump in the water.</i> Relevant to SU2.	<b>'Ought' given all the facts</b> <i>Block shaft A.</i> <i>Reprimand the swimmer.</i> Relevant to objective consequentialism

BRIDGE 1 If *S* was blameworthy for  $\Phi$ ing, *S* ought, given what *S* knew, to have not  $\Phi$ ed.

OIC If *S* ought, given what *S* knew, to have not  $\Phi$ ed, *S* could have not  $\Phi$ ed.

PAP- If *S* was blameworthy for  $\Phi$ ing, *S* could have not  $\Phi$ ed.