OBLIGATIONS – ABSOLUTE, CONDITIONED AND CONDITIONAL

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In this paper, I present semantical accounts of a variety of related kinds of ought-statement. I focus in particular on five kinds of statement: (i) statements of absolute moral obligation; (ii) statements of materially- (iii) subjunctively- and (iv) strictly-conditioned absolute moral obligation; and (v) statements of conditional moral obligation. Statements of sorts (ii) to (v) correspond to some rather puzzling and easily confused constructions of ordinary language. By appeal to my proposed semantical accounts, I try to distinguish these constructions from one another, and to explain why each has the logical features it in fact has. This may help to explain some of the otherwise baffling behavior of these "iffy oughts" of ordinary language.[1]

I

In my view, the most fundamental principle about absolute moral obligation is that we ought to do the best we can.[2] If we put the principle in this way, it becomes clear that there are two main issues to unravel — what's meant by 'best' and what's meant by 'can'. Let's consider 'can' first.

I assume that there are possible worlds other than this, the real world. I shall not attempt to explicate the concept of a possible world, but will assume that, at least in its standard use, it is clear enough for present purposes. I also assume that there are proposi- tions, and that these propositions have truth values at possible worlds. I do not assume that some propositions lack truth values at some worlds.

At every moment of moral choice, each agent has many possible worlds in his power. This may be a rather grand way of putting it, but it seems to me not unreasonable to say that, if I can stop eating these peanuts, then there is a possible world in which I do stop eating these peanuts, and which I now can make actual. Two or

three minutes from now, when all the peanuts have been eaten, I will no longer have it in my power to make actual any such world. Every one of them will have been "bypassed".

So my fundamental concept here is the concept of a world's being in an agent's power at a time. We can call this "accessibility", and use As, t, w', w to express the idea that a world, w', is accessible to an agent, s, at a time, t, from a world, w. Most of the time, when I say that some world is accessible to an agent, I mean that it is accessible to him from the actual world.[3]

We should note that many of the things that occur in worlds accessible to a given agent are not things done by that agent. For example, suppose I can stop eating these peanuts. Then there is a world now accessible to me in which I do stop eating them. A lot goes on in that world over which I have no control. The sun rises and sets. The tides come in and go out. Clearly, it would be wrong to say that I can make these things happen. Yet there is something I can do, such that if I were to do it, they would happen.

We can say that these states of affairs are "open" to me now, but we must be clear that in saying this we don't mean that they are ones that I can "make happen", or that they are ones I can prevent. Letting Ks, t, p abbreviate 'p is open to s at t', we can define this concept as follows:

D_1: Ks, t, p is true at w iff (Ew')(As, t, w', w & p is true at w')

Loosely, then, the idea is that p is open to s at t if and only if there is some p-world accessible to s at t.

On this view, then, virtually everything that has already happened, as well as everything that will inevitably happen, as well as everything that I can bring about, is open to me now. Furthermore, if I can bring about p, and q would happen if I did so, then q is open to me, too.

A state of affairs may be open to an agent at one time, but not at another, later, time. For example, if at 10:00 PM, I have not yet finished the peanuts, and am still sufficiently in control of myself as to be able to stop eating them, we may say that a certain world in which I leave some peanuts is accessible. Later on, when I can't help myself, or have finished them off, that world is no longer accessible. So the state of affairs of my leaving some peanuts was formerly open to me, but no longer is. In general, we can view life as the inexorable shrinkage of the set of accessible worlds. With every passing choice, we have closed to us options that were open until then.

It is important to recognize that, among the state of affairs open to me, many are acts of yours. So, for example, if I can make you bake cookies tomorrow, then your baking cookies tomorrow is open to me today. If you are going to bake cookies tomorrow no matter what I do, then, trivially, your baking cookies tomorrow is open to me today. It occurs in every world accessible to me now.

From the fact that some world is accessible to you now, it does not follow that it is accessible to you now. Suppose I can stop eating these peanuts, but in fact won't. Suppose, furthermore, that nothing you can do will make me stop. Then there is a world accessible to me in which I stop, but there is no world accessible to you in which I stop. There are some things I can do, but which you can't make me do. So much for 'can'. Now let's turn to 'best'.

Possible world may be ranked in terms of their intrinsic value. If we believe in "basic intrinsic value", we can say that the intrinsic value of a possible world is the sum of the basic intrinsic values of the states of affairs true there. Of course, saying this is not too interesting until some account of basic intrinsic value has been given. That, obviously, is a project for another occasion. For present purposes, we can just say that we need a ranking of possible worlds in terms of intrinsic value. The ranking allows ties, does not impose any limits on how good or evil worlds can be, and is consistent with the idea that for any values, there is one between them. This ranking of worlds is "absolute". That is, we do not evaluate worlds from the perspective of other worlds. We evaluate them according to a measure that remains the same no matter from where we view them.

We can represent the idea that a world, w, is ranked higher than another, w', by saying IVw > IVw'.

To say that a person absolutely morally ought to bring about a certain state of affairs, p, is to say that, if he does the best he can, he brings about p. We can define this notion, letting Os, t, p serve to abbreviate 's morally ought, as of t, to bring about p', as follows:

D_2: Os, t, p is true at w iff (Ew')(As, t, w', w & p is true at w' & ~(Ew'')(As, t, w'', w & IVw'' ⩾ IVw' & p is not true at w''))

Loosely, then, the idea is that s ought, as of t, to bring about p if and only if there is a p-world accessible to s at t, and there is no accessible not-p world as good as it.[4] So if I say that Smith now ought to bake cookies tomorrow, what I mean is that there is a world now accessible to Smith in which he does bake cookies tomorrow, and there is no world now accessible to Smith that

is as good as that one, and in which he does not bake cookies tomorrow.

There are a few important things to note about this concept of absolute moral obligation. First, this is a concept of the "ought to do". That should be clear in light of the agent relativization indicated by the s. Second, this concept is relativized to times. So we here speak of what s ought, as of t, to do. The time is the time at which s has the obligation, not necessarily the time at which p would occur. So s may have an obligation today to bring about p tomorrow. In this case, t would be today.

It may also be important to recognize that we are here dealing with a concept of "objective obligation". We cannot assume that any normal person knows much about which worlds are accessible to him at any time, or that he has more than a hunch as to the values of those he suspects to be accessible. D_2 is not a practical device to be used for the determination of our duties. Rather D_2 is designed to capture an important conceptual feature of what we sometimes mean when we say that someone (whether he knows it or not) objectively, morally, ought to do something.

D_2 validates a version of the "ought implies can" principle. For if s ought, at t, to bring about p, then p occurs in some world accessible to s at t. Thus, in the sense defined by D_1, p is open to s at t. However, it does not follow that s will be the one who will make p happen, or that s will continue to have p in his power right up to the time at which it would occur. Maybe he will lose this power. Maybe he will do something that will make it impossible, from then on, for him to make p happen. However, if s ought, at t, to bring about p, then there is a p-world accessible to s at t. In other words, if Os, t, p is true at a world, then Ks, t, p is true there, too.

The concept of absolute obligation introduced in D_2 has a number of interesting features. One rather odd feature is that where a state of affairs is inevitable, or unavoidable, for a person at a time, then it is obligatory for that person at that time. So, for example, if Smith baked some arsenic and ground glass cookies yesterday, he is forevermore obliged to have done so. Similarly, if Smith is going to bake such cookies tomorrow no matter what Jones does, then Smith's baking of those cookies is obligatory for Jones today. Some may find this feature so odd as to be objectionable. So it may be useful to introduce a concept of absolute obligation that does not have it:

D_3 : O*s, t, p is true at w iff Os, t, p and Ks, t, $\neg p$ are both true at w.

This concept of obligation validates a version of the principle that 'ought' implies 'can avoid'. In virtue of this, it may be closer to an important concept of obligation with which we are already familiar.

II

Now let us turn to a consideration of some of the things that can be meant by an iffy ought. The first of these can be called 'materially conditioned absolute obligation', and can be expressed by sentences of the form $p \supset$ Os, t, q. A sentence of this form is true at a world iff either p is false there or Os, t, q is true there.

The material conditional doesn't correspond very well to any conditional of ordinary English. I suspect that materially conditioned absolute obligation does not correspond very closely to any iffy ought of ordinary English, either.[5] Nevertheless, it may be interesting to consider some of the features of this construction.

In the first place, it should be clear that where an iffy ought expresses materially conditioned absolute obligation, we may validly infer the absolute obligation in the consequent from the conjunction of the iffy ought and its factual antecedent. Schematically, this may be represented as follows, where A and B represent sentences, and O is our ought operator: If A, then OB. A. Therefore, OB. This form of inference may be called "factual detachment"[6] and its validity here is assured straightforwardly by the logic of the material conditional. So we have:

$$FD_1 : ((p \supset Os, t, q) \& p) \supset Os, t, q$$

Another, closely related, form of inference may be called "deontic detachment". In this case, we infer the absolute obligation in the consequent from an iffy ought together with the obligatoriness of its antecedent. Schematically, this can be represented as: If A, then OB. OA. Therefore, OB. In the case of materially conditioned absolute obligation, deontic detachment is not valid. To see this, we need only consider a case in which the statement of materially conditioned absolute obligation is true because of a false but obligatory antecedent. Let p be the proposition that Smith does the best he can; let q be the proposition that Smith doesn't do the best he can; assume that Smith doesn't do the best he can. Then $p \supset$ Os, t, q is true (because of the false ante-

cedent). Os, t, p is, of course, true. Yet no one would accept Os, t, q. The fact that $p \supset Os,t,q$ is true in this sort of case may reveal something about why we don't make much use of materially conditioned absolute obligation. Falsity of the antecedent is sufficient to insure the truth of any such statement. No other form of iffy ought to be discussed here has this feature.

Next let us consider a form of inference called "augmentation". In augmentation, we move from an iffy ought to another just like it except that something has been conjoined to its antecedent. Schematically: If A, then OB. Therefore, if A and C, then OB.

With materially conditioned absolute obligation, augmentation is valid. For if the antecedent is false, any conjunction of it with another will still be false. If the consequent is true, the conditional is true no matter what we add to the antecedent.

We get an enormously more interesting concept when we replace the material conditional with the subjunctive. We can call the result "subjunctively conditioned absolute obligation", and we can express it by means of sentences of the form $p\square\rightarrow Os,t,q$. I assume that a sentence of this form is true at a world iff Os,t,q is true at the "nearest" p-world.[7] Clearly, pragmatic considerations, such as information about the conditions of utterance, may be relevant to the determination of what is to count as "nearest" in any given case.

Suppose I have already lost in the lottery. Nothing I can do now will bring it about that I've won. Nevertheless, it might be interesting to speculate on what my moral position would have been if I had won. Someone might say, 'If you had won, you would now have an obligation to give some to charity.' This statement would most naturally be construed as a statement of subjunctively conditioned absolute obligation. I take it to mean that in the "nearest" world where I won, I now have an obligation to give to charity. In all the best worlds accessible to me from that one, I do give to charity.

For subjunctively conditioned absolute obligation, factual detachment is valid. From $p\square\rightarrow Os,t,q$ and p, we may validly infer Os,t,q. If p is true at the real world, then the nearest world at which p is true is the real world. So if Os,t,q is true at the nearest p-world, it is true here.

Deontic detachment is not valid for subjunctively conditioned absolute obligation. So we don't have:

*DD₂: $(p\square\rightarrow Os,t,q\ \&\ Os,t,p) \supset Os,t,q$

In order to see why *DD₂ fails, we need only reflect on the fact that there may be two different ways in which p may come about. One of these, we may suppose, is more likely. If p were to occur, this is the way in which it would occur. This likely way, we can suppose, is not open to s. S can't make p occur in this way. But if p were to come about in this way, q would be obligatory for s. The other way for p to occur is less likely, but is a way currently open to s. Furthermore, s brings about p in this unlikely way in his best currently accessible worlds. If p came about in this way, q would not be obligatory. This sort of case provides a counterexample to *DD₂. For $p\square\rightarrow Os,t,q$ is true, Os,t,p is true, too, but Os,t,q is false.

To see this in a more concrete case, consider the following example. Suppose that it would be best if someone were to bake cookies. Suppose Smith can do it, but won't, and that Jones can do it, too, but also won't. Suppose nothing Smith can do will make Jones do it. Suppose further that if anyone were to do it, it would be Jones. In that case, Smith would be obliged to thank Jones for doing it. Letting s, t, p and q stand, respectively, for Smith, now, 'someone bakes cookies', and 'Smith thanks Jones for baking cookies', we have: Os,t,p and $p\square\rightarrow Os,t,q$. But since Smith ought to bake them himself, and shouldn't thank Jones, we don't have Os,t,q.

Augmentation also fails for subjunctively conditioned absolute obligation. It may be true that if Smith were to win big in the lottery, he would have an obligation to give $100,000 to charity. It does not follow that if Smith were to win big in the lottery, but to have all his winnings, confiscated by the IRS, that he would still have an obligation to give $100,000 to charity. So we must reject:

*Aug₂: $p \square\rightarrow Os,t,q \supset p\&r \square\rightarrow Os,t,q$

Where the nearest $p\&r$-world is significantly different from the nearest p-world, the truth value of Os,t,q there may also be different.

A final sort of conditioned absolute obligation may be called "strictly conditioned absolute obligation". This may be expressed by sentences of the form $p \Rightarrow Os,t,q$, where $\Rightarrow$ expresses the necessity of the material conditional. A die-hard utilitarian, who takes his utilitarianism to be necessary, might say: 'if it would maximize utility, then he ought to do it.' As I understand it, this statement may be taken to be a statement of strictly conditioned absolute

obligation. The fact that the act would maximize utility, he thinks, entails that it absolutely ought to be done.

With this kind of iffy ought, factual detachment and augmentation are valid. The case with regard to deontic detachment is somewhat less clear, but I believe that this inference is also valid. So I accept:

DD_3: $(q \Rightarrow Os,t,q \ \& \ Os,t,p) \supset Os,t,q$

If Os,t,p is true, then p is true at all the best accessible worlds. If $p \Rightarrow Os,t,q$ is also true, then Os,t,q is true at all best accessible p-worlds. This means that q is true at all best worlds accessible from those best p-worlds. Since I have assumed that accessibility is transitive, and betterness absolute, we can infer that q is true at all best accessible worlds. Thus, Os,t,q is true.

Now let us turn to conditional moral obligation, which I take to be the most interesting of these notions. My leading idea here is that we ought to do the best we can. With absolute obligation, it is only a little more complex. We have to say that a conditional obligation statement to the effect that, given that p occurs, you morally ought to bring about q, means roughly that if you do the best you can consistent with p, q occurs. So if we focus on worlds accessible to you now, we will find one in which both p and q occur, and we won't find any other p-word in which q fails to occur. If we allow $Os,t,q/p$ to express this notion, we can introduce it as follows:

D_4: $Os,t,q/p$ is true at w iff $(Ew')(As,t,w',w \ \& \ p$ is true at w'
& q is true at w' & $\sim(Ew'')(As,t,w'',w \ \& \ p$ is true at w''
& $\sim q$ is true at w'' & $IVw'' \geq IVw'))$

From the fact that q is conditionally obligatory on some condition, p, we may not infer that q is absolutely obligatory. For while q may occur in the best accessible p-world, this p-world may not be the best accessible world. Maybe a not-p world is the best accessible — and maybe not-q occurs there. For example, Brown may clean up (q) in the best worlds in which he litters (p). But in the best accessible worlds, Brown neither litters nor cleans up. So $Ob,t,q/p$ is true, but Ob,t,q is false.

Similarly, but in the other direction, we cannot infer from the fact something is absolutely obligatory, that it is conditionally obligatory on just any condition. Consider not cleaning up $(\sim q)$. That may be absolutely obligatory for Brown now. Yet on the condition that he litters (p), $\sim q$ is not conditionally obligatory. Indeed,

q is conditionally obligatory on that condition. However, if something is absolutely obligatory, there are many conditions on which it is conditionally obligatory. Necessary truths, inevitable truths, and absolutely obligatory truths are such conditions.

Some may find this concept of conditional obligation unacceptable, since it makes conditionally obligatory everything that's inevitable. So if p is inevitable, or unalterable, and you can bring about q, then p is conditionally obligatory, given q. In some instances, this will sound remarkably counter-intuitive. So we should note the following, somewhat more familiar concept of conditional obligation:

D_5: $O*s,t,q/p$ is true at w iff $Os,t,q/p$ and $Ks,t,\sim q\&p$ are true at w.

However, when I speak of conditional obligation here, I have in mind the concept introduced in D_4. Most of what I say carries over, with trivial modifications, to the more complex concept defined in D_5.

The logic of conditional obligation differs from that of each form of conditional absolute obligation. One place where this is most evident is in the case of factual detachment. We found that factual detachment is valid for each form of conditioned absolute obligation. It should be clear, however, that factual detachment is not valid for conditional obligation. That is, this is invalid:

$*FD_4$: $((Os,t,q/p) \ \& \ p) \supset Os,t,q$

We can see that this is invalid by considering a case in which s still has at t, his choice between littering (p) and not littering $(\sim p)$. Suppose his best accessible p-worlds are ones in which he also cleans up (q). Suppose in fact he is going to litter. Then $Os,t,q/p$ is true, and so is p. However, in s's best accessible worlds, he neither litters nor cleans up, so Os,t,q is false.

A modified version of the factual detachment rule is validated by D_4. If s has at t a conditional obligation to bring about q, given p, and s can't avoid p, then s has an absolute obligation at t to bring about q. Let us introduce an "unalterability" operator as follows:

D_6: Us,t,p is true at w iff $(w')(As,t,w',w \supset p$ is true at $w')$

In this sense, then, something is unalterable for a person at a time if and only if it happens in every world accessible to him then. Virtually everything in the past is unalterable. Everything that is going to happen no matter what you do is unalterable, too. How-

ever, I assume that not everything that in fact is going to happen is unalterable. Now we can introduce an acceptable factual detachment rule:

FD₄': $O_{s,t}q/p$ & $U_{s,t}p$ ⊃ $O_{s,t}q$

If every accessible world is a p-world, and the best accessible p-worlds are q-worlds, then the best accessible worlds are q-worlds. So if Brown can't avoid littering, and has a conditional obligation to clean up if he litters, then he has an absolute obligation to clean up.

Deontic detachment is straightforwardly valid for conditional obligation. That is, we have:

DD₄: $O_{s,t}q/p$ & $O_{s,t}p$ ⊃ $O_{s,t}q$

If all of s's best accessible worlds are p-worlds, and all his best accessible p-worlds are q-worlds, then all his best accessible worlds are q-worlds.

Augmentation, finally, is not valid for conditional obligation. So we reject:

*Aug₄: $O_{s,t}q/p$ ⊃ $O_{s,t}q/p\&r$

The problem here is that, even if there are accessible p&r worlds, the best of them may be much worse than the best p-worlds. In the best p&r-worlds, not-q may be the better choice. For example, Brown may have a conditional obligation to retrieve his candy wrappers if he litters. The best worlds in which he litters are ones where he finds and disposes of the candy wrappers. But the best worlds in which he litters and also starts an enormous forest fire are not worlds in which he spends his time looking for the candy wrappers. There he forgets about the candy wrappers, and tries to help put out the fire. So *Aug₄ is invalid.

It is very easy to confuse subjunctively conditioned absolute obligation with conditional obligation, and so it may be useful to point out some of the ways in which these differ. Among the most important, I think is a difference involving inaccessible antecedents. For example, suppose Smith is not able at t to win in the lottery (p). Then, no matter what q is, $O_{s,t}q/p$ has to be false — for it entails that there is a p&q-world accessible to Smith at t. However, p □→ $O_{s,t}q$ may be true. The nearest p-world need not be accessible to Smith at t, but it may be one in which $O_{s,t}q$ is true. So there are some apparent truths whose proper representation requires subjunctively conditioned absolute obligation. An example

might be the statement that if he wins in the lottery, Smith ought to give generously to charity.

Another closely related difference has to do with the way in which the temporal references may be juggled. With subjunctively conditioned absolute obligation, we can readily express views about that a person's obligations would be afterwards, if he should do certain things. It isn't as easy to represent such things with conditional obligation. To see this, consider the following case. Suppose Smith has it in his power today to bake cookies tomorrow, and also to refrain from doing so. Suppose that in fact he isn't going to bake any cookies, but that if he were to bake cookies, he would to bake rum cookies. He could, but wouldn't bake sugar cookies. We might want to affirm:

(1)   If Smith does bake cookies, then he'll have an obligation to keep them away from his children.

Let us use s, n, t, b and h to mean, respectively, Smith, now, tomorrow, 'Smith bakes cookies', and 'Smith keeps the cookies he bakes away from his children'. Consider the following possible representations of (1):

(1a) $O_{s,n}h/b$

(1b) $O_{s,t}h/b$

(1c) b □→ $O_{s,n}h$

(1d) b □→ $O_{s,t}h$

On the semantics I have proposed, these statements are not equivalent. Which of them, if any, properly represents the sense of the original statement? (1a) is unsuitable, since Smith now ought to bake sugar cookies, and give them to his children. (1b) is unsuitable, since it entails $K_{s,t}b\&h$ and, since he in fact is not going to bake the cookies, that's false. (1c) is also unsuitable since, in the nearest world where he bakes the cookies, as of now he ought to bake sugar cookies and give them to his children. But (1d) seems to say just the right thing. In the nearest world where he does bake cookies, he has, as of tomorrow, an obligation to hide them. For in that world, he bakes rum cookies, and eating them would make his children sick.

I think it is very important to recognize that none of the iffy oughts so far discussed is the same as the iffy ought associated with the concept of prima facie duty. Consider, for example, the sentence:

(2) If you promise to meet him for lunch, then you ought to meet him for lunch.

(2) is used, in ordinary English, to express something logically distinct from each of the iffy oughts I have considered here.[8] Notice, first of all, that factual detachment is not valid for (2), understood in the standard way. For suppose you did promise to meet him for lunch, but you have now come across an injured person in dire need of your assistance. Assisting the injured person is incompatible with, and more important than, keeping your luncheon appointment. Some would, in this case, want to reject (2). But others maintain that (2) remains true. Under any interpretation under which (2) is still true, it is not a statement of materially-, subjunctively-, or strictly conditioned absolute obligation. For factual detachment is valid for each of these constructions.

What may be more interesting here is that (2), under any such interpretation, is not a statement of conditional moral obligation, either. For the modified version of the factual detachment rule, FD$_4$', is valid, but the corresponding inference for (2) is still invalid. Even if it is an unalterable-for-you-now fact that you promised, you may still fail to have an absolute moral obligation to meet him for lunch. So I must emphasize the fact that I am not proposing any of the accounts presented here as an account of the iffy ought in (2), so understood. Failure to distinguish conditional obligation from "requirement" or "commitment" has, in my view, been the source of considerable misunderstanding.

We can summarize some of our main results in the following table:

Iffy ought	FD	DD	Aug
Materially conditional absolute obligation	valid	invalid	valid
Subjunctively conditioned absolute obligation	valid	invalid	invalid
Strictly conditioned absolute obligation	valid	valid	valid
Conditional obligation	invalid, but FD$_4$' is valid	valid	invalid

III

In his remarkably provocative paper on "Contrary to Duty Imperatives and Deontic Logic,"[9] Professor Chisholm proposed

a sort of test case for any view about iffy oughts. He presented four sentences which, given a suitable background, might be taken to express four logically independent, logically consistent truths. Speaking of a certain man, and certain of his neighbors, Chisholm asked us to imagine that sentences relevantly like these are all true.

(3) Smith ought to go to the aid of his neighbors.

(4) If Smith goes to the aid of his neighbors, he ought to tell them he is coming.

(5) If he doesn't go to the aid of his neighbors, then he ought not to tell them he is coming.

(6) Smith doesn't go to the aid of his neighbors.

Using s, t, g, and n to abbreviate 'Smith', 'now', 'Smith goes to the aid of his neighbors' and 'Smith tells his neighbors he is coming', we can see why these sentences are problematic. For suppose we treat (4) and (5) as statements of materially conditioned absolute obligation. Then we have:

(3') $O_{s,t,g}$

(4') $g \supset O_{s,t,n}$

(5') $-g \supset O_{s,t,-n}$

(6') $-g$

Now, however, we run into trouble. (6') entails (4'), whereas the originals were independent. Changing scopes here won't help, either. Consider:

(4") $O_{s,t,g \supset n}$

(5") $O_{s,t,-g \supset -n}$

Now, (3') entails (5"). Reading (3')–(6') as (3'), (4"), (5'), and (5') and (6') entail $O_{s,t,-n}$, while (5') and (6') entail $O_{s,t,-n}$, while Reading (3')–(6') as (3'), (4"), (5'), and (6') won't work either, since (3') and (4") entail $O_{s,t,n}$, while (5') and (6') entail $O_{s,t,-n}$.

In virtue of the temporal relations holding between going and telling, it is not easy to see how (4) and (5) could be understood as statements of subjunctively conditioned absolute obligation. Notice that $-g \mathbin{\square\!\!\rightarrow} O_{s,t,-n}$ is simply false, given the fact that (3) is true, and the assumption that he in fact isn't going to notify them. Strictly conditioned absolute obligation is irrelevant here. There's no plausibility to the view that going entails an absolute obligation to tell.

However, these statements may readily be construed as statements of conditional moral obligation. That is, I take Chisholm's sentences to be adequately represented as follows:

(3') Os,t,g
(4'') $Os,t,n/g$
(5''') $Os,t,-n/-g$
(6') $-g$

Inspection will reveal that these translations have the logical features of the originals. None entails any other. The set is consistent.

IV

In this paper, I have attempted to provide a unified account of statements of absolute moral obligation, statements of three sorts of conditioned absolute moral obligation, and statements of conditional moral obligation. With respect to the iffy oughts, I have attempted to explain how, according to my proposal, they differ logically. Finally, I have tried to show that this account provides a satisfactory solution to the problem posed by Professor Chisholm.

I have not discussed all the things one can mean by an iffy ought. Nothing much has been said here about sentences of the forms $Os,t,p \supset q$, $Os,t,p \square\rightarrow q$, and $Os,t,p \Rightarrow q$, although it should be fairly clear what I ought to say about them. I have also avoided discussion of the ought-to-be, for the most part. The iffy oughts associated with so-called hypothetical imperatives, as well as those connected with the concept of prima facie duty have not been considered here, either. These will have to be taken up on another occasion.

It seems to me that it would be useful to have some systematic way of distinguishing these things as they occur in ordinary English. I would like to be able to provide criteria by which we could determine, in any given case, which of these relatively formal structures is the structure of an informal iffy ought in ordinary English, or any other natural language. However, with my wooden ear, they all sound pretty much alike to me. Somebody else will have to take on that project.[10]

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OBLIGATIONS

NOTES

[1] A fuller treatment of iffy oughts would have to include a discussion of a variety of closely related sorts of statements. Among these are the statements of commitment associated with the notion of prima facie duty, statements expressing so-called hypothetical imperatives, and statements about the conditional probability of an absolute obligation, given some condition. A fuller treatment would also include a discussion of absolute and conditional statements of a variety of forms of non-moral obligation, most notably prudential. Furthermore, it would have to include an account of the "ought-to-be", in all of these absolute, conditioned, and conditional forms. In light of the fact that I don't say much about any of these other topics here, the present paper must be considered just a beginning.

[2] A preliminary attempt at developing this idea is contained in my "World Utilitarianism", in *Analysis and Metaphysics*, edited by Keith Lehrer (Dordrecht, 1975), 255–271.

[3] This concept of accessibility is intended to be transitive, reflexive, and symmetric, in the senses indicated by these axioms:

(*s*) (*t*) (*w*) (*w*')((*As,t,w,w* & *As,t,w*''*,w* ⊃ *As,t,w,w*)
(*s*) (*t*) (*w*) (*As,t,w,w* ⊃ *As,t,w,w*)
(*s*) (*t*) (*w*) (*w*') (*As,t,w,w* ⊃ *As,t,w,w*')

[4] Associated with this concept of moral obligation are the expected concepts of moral rightness and wrongness. Something is morally wrong for a person at a time iff it is morally obligatory for him then not to do it. Something is morally right for a person at a time iff it is not morally wrong for him then.

[5] Earle Conee has suggested this as an example of materially conditioned absolute obligation: 'If I'm not sitting here, you ought to lock me up', said by a person who is plainly sitting here.

[6] Although a number of deontic logicians have used the term 'detachment', I believe that P.S. Greenspan introduced the current use of 'factual detachment', and 'deontic detachment'. See her "Conditional Oughts and Hypothetical Imperatives', *The Journal of Philosophy*, LXXII, 10 (May 22, 1975), 259–276.

[7] For ease of exposition, I assume the view developed by Robert Stalnaker in "A Theory of Conditionals" in *Studies in Logical Theory*, edited by Nicholas Rescher (Oxford, 1968).

[8] I believe that the concept of requirement, as developed by Professor Chisholm in "The Ethics of Requirement", *The American Philosophical Quarterly*, I, 2 (April 1964), 147–153, is crucial here. (2) can be understood to mean that promising to meet him for lunch requires (in Chisholm's sense) meeting him for lunch.

[9] *Analysis* 24 (1963), 33–36.

10 ' The Accounts of absolute and conditional obligation proposed here are intended to be agent- and time-relativized versions of concepts presented by David Lewis in *Counterfactuals* (Cambridge, 1973), I have made extensive use of Lewis's ideas here. Nevertheless, I am inclined to suspect that Lewis would not endorse my approach. I am also profoundly indebted to Judith DeCew, with whom I have discussed these issues on very many occasions. Earlier versions of this paper were read at Illinois State University and Northern Illinois University. I am grateful to several people with whom I discussed the paper on those occasions, especially Jim Hunter, for valuable criticism.